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James T. Shotwell

Nov 15-1920

THE TRAVELING SALESMAN

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

JAMES FORBES

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Act of March 4, 1909.

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THE TRAVELING SALESMAN.

Produced at the Liberty Theatre, New York, August 10, 1908.

NOTE:—The characters arranged in the order in which they first speak.

MRS. BABBIT.....*Sarah McVicker*
MRS. WILLIAM HENRY DAWSON...*Maud B. Sinclair*
BILL CRABB.....*R. C. Turner*
WILLIAM HENRY DAWSON.....*Edward Ellis*
LUELLA ANN DAWSON....*Frances Golden Fuller*
WILLIAM HENRY DAWSON, JR.....*Martin Fuller*
PERCE GILL.....*Edward M. Dresser*
BETH ELLIOTT.....*Gertrude Coghlan*
FRANKLIN ROYCE.....*Percival T. Moore*
MARTIN DRURY.....*William Beach*
A CONDUCTOR.....*I. Lowenthal*
BOB BLAKE.....*Frank McIntyre*
TED WATTS.....*Arthur Shaw*
JULIUS.....*H. D. Blakemore*
JOHN KIMBALL.....*Edward Ellis*
BEN COBB.....*Nicholas Burnham*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES.

ACT I. The Depot at Grand Crossing, Christmas Day.
ACT II. BLAKE'S rooms at the Elite Hotel. Christmas Night.
ACT III. Office of FRANKLIN ROYCE. Two o'clock of the next day.
ACT IV. Same as ACT II. One hour later.

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THE TRAVELING SALESMAN

ACT I.

SCENE:—*The depot at Grand Crossing.*

TIME:—*Christmas Day.*

*It is the typical waiting-room of a village depot. The whitewashed walls are discolored by time and smoke. The woodwork is painted a dingy brown. At center back the ticket-office projects onto the stage. The window of the office is practical and on it are the letters "Ticket Window". There is a shelf in front of the window and when the window is raised there can be seen another shelf on the inside of the office. Beneath this shelf is a money drawer. On the shelf at right is a rack filled with railroad tickets. On the shelf left a ticket stamp, a telegraph blank-book with pencil attached to it by string, and an express book. At the rear of the ticket-office is a window, underneath it a shelf on which stands the telegraph instrument. In this window hangs a wreath of holly with red ribbon bow. On the right sash of this window is a small mirror. "*BETH'S*" hat and coat are hanging on a hook on the right wall inside the ticket-office.*

In the flat at R. *and* L. *of the ticket-office are doors, the upper halves of them painted to represent glass. On the outside of the glass are the words "Waiting Room". At* L. *of the door*

in the back flat and at L. 2 E. *are large windows. All the windows in the set are covered with tracing paper to suggest heavy frost and to screen the supposed arrival and departure of trains. The back drop shows a snow-covered landscape with telegraph poles and wires. The ground cloth is painted in imitation of a railroad platform and two lines of railroad tracks. At* R. I E. *is a door to the baggage room, the upper half of the glass with the lettering "Baggage Room".*

At L. *of center and at* R. *of center are wooden benches in pairs placed back to back and like those that surround the room are divided by iron arms into three seats. Above the benches at* R. *of* C. *about* R. 2 E. *is a rusted iron stove with practical door and fire effect. The stove-pipe leads off-stage* R. *through the wall of the set. On the up-stage side of the stove, stands a scuttle of coal with shovel and poker. Above the door, at* R. I E. *stands a penny-in-the-slot weighing machine. On the wall below this door is a penny-in-the-slot gum machine and another of a similar character stands on the shelf left of ticket window.* L. *of the door* R. *in back flat is a water cooler with tin cup. On the* R. *wall of the ticket-office is a blackboard announcing the arrival of trains. Below the blackboard is suspended a fire axe. On the shelf of the ticket-office* R. *is a rack with time tables. Two fire pails stand on shelves at the upper angles of the set. On the wall over the window* L. 2 E. *is a large clock and on the wall above the window hangs a large railroad map. On the wall below the window is an Express Company sign. Under the shelf of the ticket window is a Money Order sign. Over this window a "No Smoking" sign, and affixed to the right face of this window is a "Tax Sale"*

notice. On the R. *wall back of the stove is a "No Loafing" sign and over the door to the Baggage Room a sign reading "Baggage Checked* 15 *Minutes Before Train Time."*

Before the rise of the curtain is heard the noise of a departing train.

As curtain rises, through the closed window of the ticket-office can be heard the sound of the telegraph instrument.

DISCOVERED:—MRS. BABBIT *seated on the extreme edge of the bench* R. C. *Beside her a handbag, a valise and several bundles. Her attitude denotes extreme nervous tension. She looks anxiously at the clock. Enter* MRS. DAWSON, LUELLA ANN DAWSON *and* WILLIAM HENRY DAWSON, JR. *At the sound of the closing door,* MRS. BABBIT *turns quickly.*

MRS. BABBIT. Did you see a train coming?

MRS. DAWSON. No'm. (MRS. DAWSON *and* WILLIAM HENRY *cross to bench at* L. MRS. DAWSON *sits.* LUELLA ANN *stands* C., *staring at* MRS. BABBIT. MRS. DAWSON *sees her*) Luella Ann, what you gawpin' at. Come over here and sit down. (LUELLA ANN *crosses back of bench* L. *sits left end of bench.* MRS. DAWSON *is unwinding* WILLIAM HENRY'S *scarf.* WILLIAM HENRY *whispers to her*) Ain't I ever goin' to have a minit's peace? Whatcha want? (WILLIAM HENRY *whispers again*) Another drink! You children's regular sponges. (MRS. DAWSON *takes* WILLIAM HENRY *up to water cooler followed by* LUELLA ANN, *who stares at* MRS. BABBIT)

(*Enter* BILL CRABB *door* L. *in flat.*)

MRS. BABBIT. Say Mr. Crabb, when's the train due?

CRABB. (C.) What train? Think I'm a mind reader?

MRS. BABBIT. (*Rising*) Train for Bird-in-Hand!

CRABB. (*Crossing* MRS. BABBIT *to* R.) Bird-in-Hand? 'Leven fifty-three.

MRS. BABBIT. When's it due?

CRABB. Seven minits afore twelve.

MRS. BABBIT. Ain't you the cute little smart Aleck? That joke was old when my grandfather wuz alive.

CRABB. Your *grand*father? Must be a darned old joke!

MRS. BABBIT. Jest becuz the train is due at 'leven fifty-three ain't no sign it'll arrive then, on your old one-horse railroad.

CRABB. It ain't my railroad.

MRS. BABBIT. You don't say! Why, from the airs you giv yerself, thought you wuz its president.

CRABB. Not yit! Ef I wuz I wouldn't allow old wimmin to loaf 'round the depot worryin' baggage men to death. (*Exits* R. I E. MRS. BABBIT *follows him furiously*)

(MRS. DAWSON *who has been listening to the discussion smiles and crosses* L., *followed by the children, to back of bench* L. *Enter* WILLIAM HENRY DAWSON *carrying a crock of apple butter.* MRS. BABBIT *turns quickly.*)

MRS. BABBIT. Land sakes, that the 'leven fifty-three? Oh, good-morning', Mr. Dawson, merry Christmas.

DAWSON. Same to you Mrs. Babbit, and many of 'em. (*He places the crock on the bench* L. C.) Maw, keep the kids out o' this apple-butter. (*Moving* C. *towards* MRS. BABBIT) You know the wife don't you?

MRS. BABBIT. I haven't had that pleasure.

DAWSON. No? Wife, I thought you know'd Tom Babbit's widow.

MRS. BABBIT. Pleased to make your acquaintance Mrs. Dawson.

MRS. DAWSON. (*Coming down* L. *of* DAWSON) Pleased to meet you Mrs. Babbit.

DAWSON. You folks kin chin fer awhile, I've got to 'rastle that trunk off that sleigh. (DAWSON *starts to exit door* L. *in flat. The children run to* DAWSON, *crying: "I want to go with Paw".*)

DAWSON. Here, go to your Maw.

LUELLA ANN. No, no!

WILLIAM HENRY. No, no!

(DAWSON *exits,* LUELLA ANN *and* WILLIAM HENRY *follow him up to door.*)

MRS. DAWSON. William Henry! Lueller Ann come here this instant minit!

(*The children stamp their feet and cry.*)

LUELLA ANN. I want to go with Paw.

WILLIAM HENRY. I want to go with Paw.

MRS. DAWSON. (*Rushing up, grabs children, brings them* C.) Lueller Ann go sit down. (*She pushes* LUELLA ANN *who goes over to* L. *end of bench*) William Henry, come here. Behave. (*She goes over sits on bench* L., WILLIAM HENRY *stands* R. *of her.* MRS. BABBIT *indicates her horror of the children's actions. A slight pause*) Lovely weather?

MRS. BABBIT. Glad it's fine for Christmas.

LUELLA ANN. Merry Kistmas! Merry Kistmas!

MRS. DAWSON. Lueller Ann hesh yer mouth!

MRS. BABBIT. (*Pointing to* WILLIAM HENRY) Is this the baby?

LUELLA ANN. Yes, he's the baby.

WILLIAM HENRY. (*Furiously*) I ain't the baby!

LUELLA ANN. (*Crossing towards him*) You are so!

WILLIAM HENRY. (*Approaching* LUELLA) I

ain't not a baby. I'll slap your face.

MRS. DAWSON. (*Separating them*) Luella Ann, behave! (WILLIAM HENRY *goes up to penny-in-the-slot machine at* L. *of ticket window. Prods at it.* MRS. DAWSON *rises takes* LUELLA C.) Shake hands with Mrs. Babbit. There's a nice little girl. (LUELLA ANN *refuses*) Shake hands I say, or I'll shake you good.

LUELLA ANN. (*Crossing in front of her mother puts out her hand to* MRS. BABBIT. MRS. BABBIT *rises*) Hello.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Shaking* LUELLA'S *hand*) How de do, Luella Ann! (*To* MRS. DAWSON) Favors you about the eyes. She's got her father's nose but she'll outgrow it.

LUELLA ANN. (*In bewildered manner to* MRS. DAWSON) Maw, what's the matter with paw's nose?

MRS. DAWSON. I never noticed nothin' the matter with Mr. Dawson's nose. It may be a trifle large, but he keeps it out of other folks affairs. Come here, you. (*She yanks* LUELLA ANN *over to the bench. They sit.* LUELLA ANN L. *of her.* WILLIAM HENRY, JR., *comes down center from slot machine*)

MRS. BABBIT. What's your name, little boy? (*She takes his hands in hers*)

(WILLIAM HENRY *tries to kick her.*)

WILLIAM HENRY. I won't tell yer!

MRS. BABBIT. If you were my little boy——

WILLIAM HENRY. (*Interrupting*) I ain't your little boy. (*Jerks hands away*) I don't want to be your little boy. (*Runs to* MRS. DAWSON)

LUELLA ANN. (*Rising*) Maw, I don't like her. (*Sticks out her tongue at* MRS. BABBIT. WILLIAM HENRY *sees this, does likewise*)

MRS. DAWSON. Hesh! I say hesh up. It's turrible. I can't do nuthin' with 'em.

MRS. BABBIT. Ever try a bed slat? (*Enter* DAWSON *carrying tin trunk on his shoulder*) It's their father's fault, their father'll be the ruination of 'em.

DAWSON. That's right. Soak it to me. (*He starts to baggage room, bumps into* MRS. BABBIT)

MRS. BABBIT. Might as well kill a person as scare 'em to death.

DAWSON. Huh! (*Crosses toward door into baggage room*)

WILLIAM HENRY. (*Following* DAWSON) Paw! What's the matter with your nose?

LUELLA ANN. (*Following* WILLIAM HENRY) She—(*Pointing to* MRS. BABBIT) don't like your nose!

DAWSON. Well, she don't have to live with it.

MRS. BABBIT. No, thank my lucky stars! (DAWSON, LUELLA ANN, *and* WILLIAM HENRY *exit to baggage room.* LUELLA *sticks her tongue out at* MRS. BABBIT *as she goes*)

MRS. BABBIT. Going fer?

MRS. DAWSON. Over to mother's. It's about an hour's ride. We always go over every Christmas. An' occasionally on Thanksgiving Day. (*Drawing herself up proudly*) Since I've married I've got to be quite a traveler. (*Pityingly*) You don't go round much do yer?

MRS. BABBIT. Thank God I never was one to gad.

MRS. DAWSON. Yer're livin' at the Elite Hotel I b'lieve.

MRS. BABBIT. Don't know as you'd call it livin'. Cook can't boil water without burnin' it.

MRS. DAWSON. Too bad you had to give up housekeepin', sacrifice yer home.

MRS. BABBIT. Oh, it wasn't such a sacrifice. I kep' boarders fer twelve years. (*Crossing to* MRS. DAWSON) Then help's such a care (*Sarcastically*) 'Course you wouldn't understand you don't keep none.

MRS. DAWSON. (*Indignantly*) T'ain't that I couldn't if Dawson'd sell his land.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Crossing to* MRS. DAWSON, *sitting* R. *of her*) Ain't he got rid of that Junction property yet? He's as stubborn as Beth Elliott.

MRS. DAWSON. I'm no hand to gossip, but they do say that Franklin Royce that's down here for Martin Drury, lookin' after Mrs. Stratton's store since she failed, is very attentive to Beth. Wonder if that won't be a match one of these days. (*She giggles*)

MRS. BABBITT. (*Indignantly*) Nuthin' in it at all.

MRS. DAWSON. (*Resentfully*) You don't say!

MRS. BABBITT. Well, I'd ought to know, bein' Beth's most intimate friend.

MRS. DAWSON. (*Inquisitively*) She's workin' here at the depot ain't she?

MRS. BABBIT. Yes, jest as smart as a steel trap. You ought to see her work that telegraph thing, wonderful technick. Easy as you'd do a day's wash.

MRS. DAWSON. (*Angrily*) Really! You don't say.

(*Enter from baggage room,* DAWSON, LUELLA ANN, WILLIAM HENRY *and* CRABB.)

DAWSON. Say, what about my check?

CRABB. (*Pointing to sign over door*) All baggage checked fifteen minutes before train time. You kin spell can't yer? It's plain as the nose on your face.

DAWSON. (*Furiously, threatening* CRABB) You leave my nose alone.

CRABB. I ain't techin' it. (*Crosses* DAWSON, *glares at* LUELLA ANN *and* WILLIAM HENRY) Well!

(LUELLA ANN *and* WILLIAM HENRY *run to their mother at left screaming "Maw! Maw!"*)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Rising*) Ain't you ashamed? A grown-up man pickin' on children. You outer be reported.

CRABB. Go on, do it. You ain't much else to do. (*Crosses up to door* L. *in flat.* MRS. BABBIT *following him*)

MRS. BABBIT. Mind you let me know when the 'leven fifty-three arrives or I'll have you fired. (CRABB *exits slamming door in her face*) Ain't he ornery little shrimp

(*Automobile heard off* L.)

DAWSON. That's Perce Gill in his atmobeel.

(MRS. DAWSON *followed by* LUELLA ANN *and* WILLIAM HENRY *rush to window* L.)

WILLIAM HENRY. Maw I want to see.

LUELLA ANN. I want to see what's tootin', Paw! (*Climbs on bench.* MRS. DAWSON *lifts* WILLIAM HENRY *up on bench*) He ain't tootin Paw make him toot it.

MRS. DAWSON. (*Looking out window*) Which of the wimmin is Mrs. Gill?

MRS. BABBIT. (*Looking out window over* MRS. DAWSON'S *shoulder*) The one Mr. Gill's payin' no attention to.

MRS. DAWSON. Ain't they dressed to madness? What's them things on their eyes.

DAWSON. Blinders! All women ought to wear 'em. .

MRS. BABBIT. Guess most married wimmin'd be easier in their minds if they did. (*Enter* PERCE GILL *door* L. *in flat.* MRS. BABBIT *turning quickly from window*) Is that the 'leven fifty-three? Oh, how de do, Mr. Gill. Merry Christmas.

GILL. Same to you, widder. (*Joins* DAWSON *at* C.) Hello, Dawson, Merry Christmas.

DAWSON. Same to you Perce!

GILL. (*To* MRS. DAWSON *who has come down* L. *to* L. *of bench*) Why how de do, Mrs. Dawson.

MRS. DAWSON. How de do, Mr. Gill. Merry Christmas.

LUELLA ANN. (*Running to* GILL *at* C.) Merry Kistmas! Merry Kistmas!

GILL. (*Picking her up in his arms and swinging her around to his right*) Same to you Luella Ann. Got a kiss for me to-day?

LUELLA ANN. (*Kissing him*) One frum me, (*Kissing him again*) and one frum Santa Claus.

GILL. Well, Santa Claus didn't bring me nothin' better'n that. (*He turns to* WILLIAM HENRY, JR., *who has followed* LUELLA ANN *to* C.) How's William Henry, Jr.?

WILLIAM HENRY. (*Frightened at goggles and fur coat, runs to* MRS. DAWSON) Oh, Maw, I'll be good, I'll be good!

LUELLA ANN. (*Following* WILLIAM HENRY) Cry baby! Scardey cat! (*Turning back to* GILL) I ain't afraid o' you. (*Laughs loudly*) Oh, Maw, don't he look like a Teddy Bear?

MRS. DAWSON. Don't be forward Lueller Ann.

DAWSON. (*Moving to front of bench* R.) Ain't that kid the caution?

GILL. (*Moving over toward bench* R.) Chip o' the old block! Takin' a trip Dawson?

DAWSON. Not very fer!

LUELLA ANN. (*At* C.) We're goin' over to granmas. To show her what Santa Claus brought me. I got a dolly.

WILLIAM HENRY. (*Coming to* R. *end of bench* L.) I got a sled.

LUELLA ANN. And new pants. They used to be Paw's. (*Raising her skirts*) I got new pants too!

WILLIAM HENRY. They used to be maw's.

(GILL *and* DAWSON *laugh loudly.* MRS. BABBIT *is horrified and* MRS. DAWSON *much embarrassed.*)

MRS. DAWSON. (*Running to* LUELLA) Lueller Ann put down your clothes this instant minit. You're much too big a girl. (*She takes* LUELLA ANN *over to bench under window* L. 2 E. WILLIAM HENRY *joins them*)

MRS. BABBIT. How's folks, Mr. Gill?

GILL. Oh, prosperous—(*Laughs*)

DAWSON. (*Going up back of bench* R.) I should think so—that atombeel must a set you back a few——

GILL. (*Moving* R. *above bench*) Oh, a few hundreds—(*Gives* DAWSON *cigarette*)

MRS. BABBIT. A fool and his money soon parted —(*Goes up to slot machine* L. *of ticket window*)

GILL. We're here only onct——

MRS. BABBIT. Lucky for you. At the rate you're goin', if you had to come back you'd be eatin' cobble-stones—(*Working slot-machine*)

GILL. Look a here, widder, I ain't spendin' your money——

MRS. BABBIT. You bet you ain't—you nor no other man——

(CRABB *enters* R. *door in flat with tire.*)

CRABB. Here's your tire—(*Leans tire up against* L. *bench* R.)

MRS. BABBIT. Say, you, my penny's in that box—(*Coming to* C.)

CRABB. Well, what about it?

MRS. BABBIT. There's this about it—I put my money in there—(*Moving down* C.) and got nothin' for my pains. That machine's a lying snare——

CRABB. It ain't workin'—(*Winks at* GILL *and* DAWSON)

MRS. BABBIT. There ain't much about this depot as is workin'——

CRABB. Well, you've been workin' your jaw considerable——

MRS. BABBIT. I'm not the woman to stand by and left you or anybody else rob me! (*Goes to window and pounds on it; it is raised to disclose* BETH ELLIOTT)

(CRABB *moves across front of bench* R., *near his exit* R. I E.)

MRS. BABBIT. Why, Beth Elliott, you've been here all this time——

BETH. (*Leaning out of window*) What's the matter?

MRS. BABBIT. My penny's in the box——

DAWSON. Oh, quit fussin', it's only a penny. (*Crossing to* R. *of ticket-window*)

BETH. The penny sometimes sticks. (*Going out of ticket office to slot machine. As she starts* CRABB *looks as though tired of it all*)

MRS. BABBIT. Very likely, I'm not castin' any insinuations, but I'd find out where it sticks—(*Looks at* CRABB)

(CRABB *exits* R. I E. *shaking his fist at* MRS. BABBIT. BETH *gives* MRS. BABBIT *chewing gum.*)

MRS. BABBIT. How are you, dear?

BETH. Fine—how are you?

MRS. BABBIT. (*Proceeds to eat chewing gum*) My dispepsy's killing me—(*Crossing to bench* L. BETH *back in office*)

GILL. Too much riotous livin', widder——

MRS. BABBIT. (*Moving down to upper bench* L.) Guess you never took your meals steady at the Elite—(*Sits with back to audience*)

DAWSON. Well, how is business, Beth?

BETH. Very slow to-day—who cares to leave home on Christmas Day—where to?

DAWSON. Over to Mother's—(*Getting money*)

(BETH *gets two tickets, stamps them, etc.* ROYCE *enters* L. *door in flat.*)

DAWSON. (*At* R. *of ticket window*) Hello, Royce——

ROYCE. (*Comes down. Accosts everyone*) Hello, Dawson—Mrs. Babbit—(*Crosses to ticket window*) How do you do, Miss Elliott?

BETH. How do you do, Mr. Royce? Did you receive the telegram I delivered this morning?

ROYCE. To meet Mr. Drury here—yes. Have you received orders to flag that through train for him?

BETH. Yes, I've attended to it——

GILL. (*Moving over* L. *end of bench* R.) Thought that was your boss, old Martin Drury, I passed just outside the town. (*Getting tire and carrying it over* L. *shoulder*) He goin' to take a train to-day?

ROYCE. Yes.

GILL. Well, I hope he gets here—he's riding in one of them Junction hacks—(*All laugh. Moving to* L. *of window*—ROYCE *crosses to stove*) See your land's up for sale again, Beth?

BETH. Yes, to-morrow—the taxes haven't been paid for years.

GILL. Well, if the township ain't been able to find a buyer in all these years I guess you needn't worry—anyway it ain't worth nothin'.

BETH. Father was sure it would be valuable some day.

GILL. Well, what your paw didn't know about land would fill a book——

MRS. BABBIT. (*Turning where she sits*) What do you know about it, shiftless critter, careerin' around the country lettin' your land go to the dogs!

GILL. Maybe—but my women-folks don't punch tickets for a livin'—(MRS. BABBIT *sits around and subsides*) Seems a pity to see a nice girl like Beth wastin' herself in a railroad office when there's so

many men that'd like to take her out of it, eh, Dawson? And guess if rumor's true she wouldn't have so all fired far to go, eh, Royce? (BETH *puts down window in ticket office.* GILL *laughs loudly at his own thrust*) Come out and see me shoe my nag—(*Exits followed by* DAWSON)

MRS. DAWSON. Comin', Mrs. Babbit. (*Exits, followed by* LUELLA ANN *and* WILLIAM HENRY)

(BETH *comes out of ticket-office, carrying express book, crosses to baggage room and exits. Enter* DRURY L. *door in flat.*)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Rises—to* DRURY) Excuse me —did you see my train comin'?

DRURY. I wasn't looking for it, Madam.

(*Enter* CRABB *with flag. Comes to* C.)

MRS. BABBIT. Would you let me know when it's eleven fifty-three? (*Looks at* CRABB) Can't trust that loafer of a baggageman——

CRABB. Nobody ast you to. (*Shakes flag at her*)

MRS. BABBIT. Speak when you're spoken to—(CRABB *and* MRS. BABBIT *exit.* CRABB *exits door* R., *back.* MRS. BABBIT *door* L. *back*)

ROYCE. (*Coming to* R.) Your wire was a surprise, Mr. Drury: thought you'd been spending Christmas with your family——

DRURY. (*Down to* ROYCE) Can't let holidays interfere with business.

ROYCE. Coming over to the store.

DRURY. (*Taking out watch*) Haven't time—my train will be here in a minute I've been over to the Junction, picking up a little something from Santa Claus——

ROYCE. Oh, you don't want to see me about the store?

DRURY. (*Moving to bench* L., *sits*) I've got

another job for you, something in the real estate line——

ROYCE. (*Crosses to bench and sits*) Anything you say, Mr. Drury.

DRURY. Now listen to me. (*Both sit on bench*) Then keep a close mouth about it; the railroad's got a deal on foot. I've been tipped off that they're going to put another spur of tracks through at the Junction.

ROYCE. They don't know that down here.

DRURY. Don't interrupt me with fool remarks! Of course they don't. Think the railroad is advertising what they're going to do? I've a man at headquarters, and he and I are going to milk that railroad dry. I hustled down here this morning to look the ground over, found that the piece they need is to be sold to-morrow by the township, for accumulated taxes.

ROYCE. Who's the owner?

DRURY. I was told it's known as Elliott's Stone Pile.

ROYCE. Elliott—why, that must be Beth Elliott's land.

DRURY. Who's she? Where is she?

ROYCE. Here.

DRURY. What?

ROYCE. She's the operator at this depot.

DRURY. We must have that land before the railroad can reach her.

ROYCE. Why don't you make her an offer for it here, now?

DRURY. Why? You can go over to-morrow and buy it in; all you've got to do is to pay the taxes. They can't amount to more than a few hundred dollars.

ROYCE. (*Rises and crosses* C.) I don't like the job.

DRURY. Oh, I see, a little bit taken with the girl! Don't be a chump, Royce. Women are strewed

around for the asking; but in this world it's money; cold, hard money, that talks.

ROYCE. (*Sitting again*) What do I get out of it?

DRURY. I can't appear in the deal, it might get too warm for my friend at headquarters; I'll declare you in on it.

ROYCE. I may queer myself with her.

DRURY. Not if I know anything about women. Man's more attractive backed up by a little money, and I've never found them inquisitive as to where you get it. Well, are you with us. (*Whistle*) It's you or some other man.

ROYCE. I don't know——

DRURY. Guess that's my train. (*Crosses to* C.)

ROYCE. (*Rises and Crosses to* DRURY) I'll take it on.

DRURY. That's good. (BETH *enters* R., *comes quickly back of* DRURY *and* ROYCE *and exits to ticket office.* ROYCE *points to* BETH. DRURY *looks at her*) Now you pump that girl; I'll be down in the afternoon on the 2:15.

(*Train effect louder.* BETH *opens ticket window.* MRS. BABBIT *enters door* L. *in back flat.*)

MRS. BABBIT. That my train?

(ROYCE *and* DRURY *look at her, laugh, and exit quickly, door* R. *in back flat.*)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Rushes to bench—picks up bundles, drops one on way to door, etc., looks out door*) THAT MY TRAIN?

OUTSIDE VOICE. Yes, if you're going to Indianapolis.

MRS. BABBIT. You keep a civil tongue in your head. (*Train pulls out.* MRS. BABBIT *goes to bench and drops bundles. Enter* GILL)

GILL. Say, Miss Beth, got a crowbar handy?

BETH. No—what's the matter?

GILL. Machine's out a wack. Kin I borrow this poker?

BETH. Certainly.

(GILL *gets poker at stove* R.)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Moving up back of bench* R.) Better take the axe.

GILL. Good idea. (*Gets axe at* R. *of railroad ticket window*) When an atmobeel gets balky you never kin tell what will come in handy. (*Crossing to* L.)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Coming* L., *front of ticket window*) Well, if I owned one of them pesky contrapshuns seems to me I'd know enough to doctor it.

GILL. (*At door* L. *in flat*) Oh, you would, would you? Well, if you know so all-fired much, maybe, you'll come out and give us the benefit of your valuable advice.

MRS. BABBIT. I will. (*Coming close to* GILL) I'm no mechanic, but I ain't run a sewing machine for twelve years without knowin' somethin' about machinery! (MRS. BABBIT *exits, followed by* GILL)

(BETH *crosses to window over* L. *from ticket office.* ROYCE *enters from door* R. *in flat; stops in front of ticket window, looks in, then sees* BETH.)

BETH. Oh, I do hope they'll be careful. (*Looking out window*)

ROYCE. Careful? Of what?

BETH. Mrs. Babbit's pokin' around that automobile—(*Looking at* ROYCE) and I'm afraid it will go off, or something. (*Looking out window*)

ROYCE. Oh, I wouldn't worry.

BETH. I don't want to lose the only friend I have.

ROYCE. Only friend? What about me?

BETH. Oh, you!

ROYCE. Don't I count for anything? Gill seemed to think so with his obvious hints that I wished to marry you.

BETH. That's country humor. (*Coming* C.)

ROYCE. Suppose I considered it a serious suggestion?

BETH. What good would that do—if I consider it a humorous one?

ROYCE. It goes against the grain to see you work.

BETH. Why shouldn't I work? I'm well, strong (*Moving to* R. *bench* L.) and moderately happy.

ROYCE. Moderately!

BETH. Well, if a placard (*Pointing to placard*) advertising the sale of all you possess in the world was staring you out of countenance, you wouldn't be exactly joyful, would you?

ROYCE. Oh, is your land to be sold? (*Going up to placard*)

BETH. The township will offer it for sale again to-morrow.

ROYCE. Can't you pay your taxes? (*Reading placard*)

BETH. I haven't enough money.

ROYCE. (*Meaningly*) Much due on it? (*Moving down* C.)

BETH. That depends on what "much" signifies; four hundred dollars is a fortune to me——

ROYCE. (*Meaningly*) Do you think anyone's likely to go over to the Junction to-morrow and bid it in?

BETH. My friends know how much it means to me, and they wouldn't take advantage of me. Besides, if anyone did, I should be furiously angry.

ROYCE. (*Moving toward her*) I don't believe

you could; you're so invariably charming that I can't imagine you different.

BETH. I'd be different, all right! (*Moving up-stage*)

ROYCE. (*Moving up to her*) Would you really put up a fight?

BETH. Would I? I'd give the person who tricked me out of my land the surprise of his life.

ROYCE. I think that's a bluff. I'm sure you'd be like every other woman: admire the man who defeated you.

BETH. That shows how little you know Beth Elliott. (*Going into office. Enter* MRS. BABBIT L. *door in flat*)

MRS. BABBIT. (*To* ROYCE) I can't stay out there catching chillblains just to see Perce Gill break his neck, (*Moving down to bench* R. ROYCE *crossing* L. *by bench*) though it'd be a good riddance to the community and at the same time a real pleasure to me.

BETH. Did you fix the machine?

MRS. BABBIT. Certainly: after they all got through with their crowbars, I just jabbed something with a hairpin. (*Sits down on bench* R.)

BETH. (*To* ROYCE) Did you want to see me about anything in particular?

ROYCE. No—just to say Merry Christmas. (*Coming to ticket-window*)

BETH. (*Indifferently*) Merry Christmas.

ROYCE. Now that I've said it, I'll be going along. When do you shut up shop?

BETH. (*Indifferently, fixing change in drawer*) Crabb comes on duty in the afternoon.

ROYCE. May I come back to walk home with you?

BETH. If you care to. (*Fixing tickets in rack*)

ROYCE. That means?

BETH. (*Carelessly, not looking at him*) Just what it says. Good-bye.

(MRS. BABBIT *laughs to herself.*)

ROYCE. (*Staggered*) Good-bye. Good-morning, Mrs. Babbit, pleased to have seen you. (*Exit door* L. *in flat*)

MRS. BABBIT. I can't abide that man.

BETH. (*Coming out of office, down to* MRS. BABBIT) Oh, he's very agreeable.

MRS. BABBIT. So is Satan; I hope you ain't goin' to take up with him.

BETH. (*Back of bench*) Oh, dear, no.

MRS. BABBIT. It ain't his fault; he's wore a beaten track ever since he's been here, from this depot to the store, and I notice you go to his office considerable.

BETH. That's business: Mr. Royce receives a great many telegrams, and it's part of my work to deliver them.

MRS. BABBIT. Of course I've no right to interfere.

BETH. (*Putting arm around her*) You couldn't interfere.

MRS. BABBIT. I s'pose I'm an old busybody?

BETH. (*Putting her cheek against* MRS. BABBIT'S) You're an old dear.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Looks more pleasant*) Glad somebody thinks so. Tom Babbit aluz said I had the disposition of a crab-apple, (*Turning to* BETH, *taking her hand*) but you mean a lot to me, dearie, and I don't want you to throw yourself away.

BETH. On Mr. Royce! (*Crossing towards* C.)

MRS. BABBIT. I never could trust a man so all-fired polite—'tain't natural! I'm not one to gossip, but they do say him and Martin Drury beat Mrs. Stratton out of the store.

BETH. Why did she let herself be robbed? I wouldn't!

MRS. BABBIT. (*Rising*) But you got spunk

—that's why I allus liked you. (*Crossing to* BETH) When your Paw died you didn't set around and cry, you got out and hustled, though you know I allus tell you my foldin' bed's big enough for both of us.

BETH. Yes, I know; bless your heart, but you liked me because I've a home of my own.

MRS. BABBIT. Home—hm! It seems like slanderin' the word to apply it to Mrs. Tompkins' boardin-house. Where's your dinner?

BETH. In here. (*Going into office, picks up dinner basket, shows it to* MRS. BABBIT)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Following* BETH *up to ticket window*) Lands' sakes, it ain't right, you'd oughter be eatin' side a some good man! Why don't you take up with some nice fellers around here? It ain't for want of a chance, for I never seed in all my life so many men shoppin' for railroad tickets. (*Crosses* R. *back of bench* R.)

(*Enter* GILL *with the axe which he returns to its place. He is followed by* MRS. DAWSON, LUELLA ANN *and* WILLIAM HENRY *who carries the poker and exits unobserved, into baggage room.* MRS. DAWSON *comes down and sits on bench* L., LUELLA ANN *beside her.* GILL *crosses back to ticket window.*)

GILL. By gosh, Miss Beth I clean forgot to pay the charges on them tires. How much?

BETH. A dollar ten.

GILL. Them machines do certainly burn up money. (*Gives her bill*) Must take a spin with me some day.

BETH. (*Giving him change*) I'd like to, Mr. Gill.

MRS. BABBIT. Want to kill her? Well, when yer dead and gone, remember I warned yer. (GILL *exits, whistle blows off* L., *distant noise of approaching train.* DAWSON *enters excitedly*)

DAWSON. Come on, Maw. (MRS. DAWSON *starts for the door*) Bring the bundles—the bundles! (*Exits*)

MRS. DAWSON. (*Rushing back to bench, grabbing bundles*) I'm so excited I don't know where I'm at. (*Looking around*) I can't find my little grip. Mrs. Babbit, Mrs. Babbit give me a hand! (MRS. DAWSON *rushes up to door* L. *in flat. Calling off*) Paw, Paw, my little grip!

(MRS. BABBIT *drops her bundle on bench* R., *crosses to* C. MRS. DAWSON *comes down* L. *of bench* L. LUELLA ANN *runs up to door* L. *in flat. Exits.*)

CRABB. (*Off-stage*) All aboard! All aboard! Eleven fifty-three. (*Enters door* R. *in flat*)

MRS. BABBIT. Someone hold that train!

CRABB. (*Coming down to* MRS. BABBIT C.) All aboard, 'leven fifty-three.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Turning on him furiously*) Don't stand there, you big lummix, give us a hand!

(*Exit* CRABB R. *door in flat.*)

MRS. DAWSON. (*Running up to door* L. *in flat*) Paw, Paw, my little grip. I can't find my little grip.

(*Enter* DAWSON *door* L. *in flat, comes down by bench center, followed by* LUELLA ANN.)

DAWSON. What's the matter with you? What have you lost?

MRS. DAWSON. My little grip!

(MRS. BABBIT *picks up valise* R. *of bench* L., *turning quickly jams it into* DAWSON'S *stomach.*)

DAWSON. (*Grabbing it from her*) Is this the one?

MRS. DAWSON. No, my *little* grip.

(*Enter* CONDUCTOR L. *door in flat. Stands left of door.*)

CONDUCTOR. All aboard!

MRS. BABBIT. Hold that train. It's life or death.

DAWSON. (*Picking up small grip underneath bench* L.) Here it is right in front of yer eyes. You wimmin can't find nuthin'.

MRS. DAWSON. Of course, I'm to blame.

DAWSON. Come on here. (*He starts for door* L. *in flat, followed by* MRS. DAWSON *and* LUELLA ANN)

CONDUCTOR. Get a move on!

DAWSON. Don't give me none of your lip.

MRS. DAWSON. (*Separating them*) That's right, pick a fuss. (DAWSON *exits.* MRS. DAWSON *grabs* LUELLA'S *hand, puts out other hand for* WILLIAM HENRY. *He is not there*) My Gawd! Where's the baby?

(*Enter* CRABB, R. *door in flat.* MRS. DAWSON *and* MRS. BABBIT *rush to him. Both crying: "Where's the baby?"* CRABB *stands bewildered.* CONDUCTOR *keeps calling "All aboard". Presently from door to baggage room enter* WILLIAM HENRY, *carrying a red flag over his shoulder.*)

WILLIAM HENRY. All aboard! All aboard!

(MRS. BABBIT *grabs* WILLIAM HENRY *spanks him.* CRABB *jerks the flag from* WILLIAM HENRY'S *hand,* MRS. DAWSON *grabs him and shakes him.* DAWSON *appears at door yelling "Come on".* CONDUCTOR *continues to yell "All aboard",* WILLIAM HENRY *cries loudly, the* DAWSON *family clamber on train.*)

CRABB. (*To* MRS. BABBIT) All aboard, 'Leven fifty-three.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Catching sight of crock of apple butter forgotten in the excitement*) Don't bother me. (*Picks up crock, rushes to door*) Mrs. Dawson! Mrs. Dawson! Here's your apple butter! (CONDUCTOR *grabs the crock from her*) Good-bye —Good-bye! (*The* CONDUCTOR *slams the door in her face.* MRS. BABBIT *comes down wearily, sits bench* L. *Effect of departing train.* MRS. BABBIT *looks up at clock. To* CRABB) Say, when *does* that 'Leven fifty-three go?

CRABB. (*Shrieking with laughter*) It's jest gone!

MRS. BABBIT. (*Rising quickly*) What? (*Chases* CRABB *off through door to Baggage Room*)

BETH. (*Coming out of office*) Why, Mrs. Babbit, aren't you going!

MRS. BABBIT. (*Furiously*) Oh, no, I'm not going, just loafin' around the depot. (*Picks up bundles one after the other*)

BETH. Oh, I'm so sorry.

MRS. BABBIT. That's your reward for a healthful, self-sacrificing nature! Drat that Dawson woman; I wish I had her here for five minutes!

BETH. There is a later train. (*Going back to ticket-office*)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Putting cape on and getting bundles*) I'll get even with this road: give me back my dollar thirty-three; just for spite I won't go. (*Gets ticket out of bag, slams it on shelf of window. Crossing to ticket office*)

BETH. (*At window of ticket-office*) It's too bad. (*Takes ticket*)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Crying*) I'm a poor unfortunate, spendin' Christmas in a hotel room! Not a soul to pass me a kind word.

BETH. (*Giving* MRS. BABBIT *money for ticket*) Never mind, I'll come over to-night and we'll cheer up together.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Taking money*) Do.

BETH. Good-bye for the present.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Crossing to door* L. *in flat*) Good-bye—good-bye. (*Stops*) Say — say — my trunk's on that train. (*Walking toward office*) You telegraph for it; I ain't got a clean night-gown to my back! (*Exits door* L. *in flat*)

(BETH *lays her head on the counter and laughs heartily. Enter* BLAKE U. L., *a typical city drummer. He has a dress-suit case and umbrella. He comes to window.* BETH *has her head buried in her arms laughing; she doesn't hear him; there is a pause.* BLAKE *looks at her for a moment, then the contagion of her laugh strikes him and he joins in.* BETH *raises her head; they look at each other.*)

BLAKE. (*Standing* L. *of window. Facing front in the entire scene*) Go on, enjoy yourself, don't mind me. (*Putting grip down*)

BETH. What can I do for you?

BLAKE. Put me close to that joke—it must be good——

BETH. Sir?

BLAKE. I beg your—(*Bowing to her*) pardon. When does the next train go?

BETH. North or South?

BLAKE. Search me!

BETH. Sir?

BLAKE. (*Turning*) I—(*Bowing*) beg your pardon—but, I don't know which is which: my bump of locality's a dimple.

BETH. Where did you come from?

BLAKE. I got off that train just as it pulled out.

BETH. Where do you wish to go?

BLAKE. (*Strong*) Back.

BETH. How far?

BLAKE. Search me.

BETH. This is a depot, not a customs-house. (*She turns away to telegraph instrument on shelf at back of ticket office*)

BLAKE. (*To himself. Moving down stage to* R., *bus. hand to jaw, etc.*) That rang the bell—(*Turning up*) See here, Miss, I beg your pardon, (BETH *comes to window*) but I must have come from somewhere. (*Going up to window at* R. *of window, and facing audience*)

BETH. (*Freezingly*) Presumably—you're a stranger to me.

BLAKE. I can remedy that. See here, my good girl.

BETH. I am not your good girl!

BLAKE. I'm not to blame for that. (BETH *is indignant*) I beg your pardon, but I'm lost.

BETH. How careless! (BLAKE *gets in front of window.* CRABB *enters* R. I E. *from baggage-room*) Oh, Mr. Crabb (*To* BLAKE) stand to one side, please. (BLAKE *goes* R. *a little, to stove*) Now, don't hurry over your dinner, Mr. Crabb, I have mine here. Have a good time with the kiddies. (CRABB *passing window to door* L. *in flat*) Wait, I have something for them. (CRABB *stops, looks at clock.* BETH *takes out a package wrapped in tissue-paper and decorated with holly and red ribbon*) Give them my love and a Merry Christmas!

CRABB. (*Coming to window, wipes hands on trousers*) Thank you, Miss—thank you. (*Exits door* L. *in flat*)

BLAKE. She's a nice little party. (*Sings*) "Gee I wish I had a girl." (*He crosses to window; as he reaches it,* BETH *closes it*) Going down! Blake, you're in wrong—(BLAKE *goes to the* R. *window and taps meekly, then he taps again;* BETH *opens it quickly*)

BETH. This office is closed except for the trans-

mission of telegrams. (*She starts to close the window;* BLAKE *stops her with left hand*)

BLAKE. All right, me for transmitting! (*Lays umbrella on ledge of window.* BETH *pulls a pad of telegraph blanks and a pencil tied with a string; shoves them toward him indifferently, looks over his head.* BLAKE *smiles and looks at her.* BETH *turns away, frowning*) Cold, to-day. (*Looks at her again, smiling and turns away*) Colder with occasional snow. (*Fishes for pencil which dangles at end of string*) What's the date? (*Starts to write*)

BETH. I believe Christmas usually falls on December 25th.

BLAKE. (*Lays down pencil*) You must think me foolish.

BETH. You weren't in my thoughts.

BLAKE. (*Quickly bends over to write*) What's this place?

BETH. Grand Crossing.

BLAKE. Why, that's where I want to go. (*Pushing telegraph pad*)

BETH. Don't let me detain you. (*Turns up to telegraph instrument*)

BLAKE. (*Turning and stepping down a bit, then directly to window*) I was out last night but I wasn't bad. Now wait a minute. I woke up as we left the last stop an' I distinctly heard some yap articulate, Grand Crossing.

BETH. (*Comes back to window*) That was Grand Crossing Junction.

BLAKE. You must think me stupid.

BETH. (*Witheringly*) How could I? (BLAKE *looks front. The instrument begins to tick loudly.* BETH *turns to it.* BLAKE *looks at her*) That is the Junction calling now? (BLAKE *crosses to* L. *of window*) Is your name Blake?

BLAKE. Yes.

BETH. What's your first name?

BLAKE. Are we going to tell real names? (*Looking through window*)

BETH. A Mr. Watts, Ted Watts, wants to know if you are Bob Blake?

BLAKE. That's my number. (*Looking front—loud laugh from* BETH) What does he say?

BETH. (*Coming to window*) He was describing you. It's so funny.

BLAKE. Do I fit it?

BETH. Yes, that's why it is so funny.

BLAKE. Don't you dare identify me! I'll punch his fat head. I wired him to meet me here. What'd he go over to the Junction for?

BETH. I'm not in Mr. Watts' confidence. I suppose you gave him Junction time and some trains stop there that go through here.

BLAKE. Isn't that a hit? It's a wonder that he wouldn't have looked it up and found out if I were right! Isn't it funny how stupid some people are?

BETH. What shall I wire?

BLAKE. Just say, Hello, Wattsie! (BETH *smiles, turns up to ticker. Pause*) Tell him to bring over my trunks and meet me at the hotel. What's he say now?

BETH. (*Coming to window*) The Junction says he can't repeat it to a lady. (*Look at each other seriously, then both laugh,* BLAKE *loudly*)

BLAKE. There is a hotel?

BETH. The Elite.

BLAKE. Oh, say not so! The Elite! Can't you see it? (BETH *starts to close the window*) Just a minute, is the lunch counter transmitting?

BETH. We haven't such a luxury.

BLAKE. Where is the nearest coaling station?

BETH. You can have a lovely Christmas dinner at the Elite.

BLAKE. Elite doesn't listen well. Watts won't

get back in time. Isn't it awful to eat your Christmas dinner alone?

BETH. Oh, I don't know. I am obliged to eat mine alone.

BLAKE. Oh, no, you're not: I'll eat with you. (*Swinging round, looking in window*)

BETH. You're what I might call——

BLAKE. Fresh, sure I am. You don't like stale men, do you? Come on, what's the use of being lonesome apart? Let's be miserable together. (*Facing window*)

BETH. You're not very flattering.

BLAKE. (*Walks round, down-stage to* L.) I don't dare be—you'll jump on me.

BETH. (*Laughing in spite of herself*) You funny man!

BLAKE. What, funny to you, or funny to look at? (*Facing her*)

BETH. Fishing. I'm going to take pity on you: Miss Beth Elliott requests the pleasure of Mr. Blake——

BLAKE. (*Bowing to her with hat in hand*) Bob to you, Bob to you! (*Comes to window*)

BETH. Mr. "Bob" Blake's company to luncheon immediately.

BLAKE. (*Bowing hat off*) Mr. Bob Blake accepts Miss Beth—short for Elizabeth? (*Turning front*) Sweet name, "Beth"——

BETH. (*Getting basket*) I just escaped being Lizzie. (*Takes cover off basket*) It looks awfully good.

BLAKE. (*Meaningly*) Looks good to me.

BETH. You like turkey?

BLAKE. (*Looking at her*) I wasn't looking at the turkey.

BETH. That's just where you'd better look, young man.

BLAKE. Will I come in there?

BETH. No, against the rules.

BLAKE. (*Crossing to* R. *of window, taking off hat*) Let me get in the bread-line.

BETH. What are you doing?

BLAKE. (*Interrupting*) Oh, this isn't a hand out, it's to be a buffet lunch.

BETH. (*Interrupting*) We'll eat over there. (*Pointing to bench* R.)

BLAKE. (*Putting hat on*) Oh, going to be a regular party! Can I help you? (*Reaching for basket, she takes it away*)

BETH. Yes, put some coals on the fire.

BLAKE. Well, I'm the cutest little fireman! (BETH *crosses in to* R. *with lunch during stove business.* BLAKE *takes handle of stove door—fingers burned—then looks at her, catching her laughing at him. Picks up coal scuttle*) Ain't I the handiest little thing around the house? (*He empties scuttle, but as he is looking at* BETH *the coal falls on the floor*)

BETH. (*Holding up glass which she has taken from basket*) Oh, there's only one glass.

BLAKE. That's all right, I'll drink out of the bottle.

BETH. Oh, you can't drink anything out of a bottle.

BLAKE. I don't know. (*Taking off coat*)

BETH. Possibly you've had more experience?

BLAKE. My dear young—operator, I had you there! (*Putting down hat and coat on up-stage bench* R. *Coming down to* L. *of bench*) I'm not so crazy about bottled goods.

BETH. (*Sitting extreme* R. *of bench* R. *Basket on bench* L. *of her*) That's good.

BLAKE. I'm glad you feel that way. (*Standing by bench* L. *end*)

BETH. Why should I care?

BLAKE. No reason, but I wish you did.

BETH. (*Oblivious*) Have some turkey?

BLAKE. Gimme the neck. (*Sitting*) Thanks.

BETH. (*Hands bread and butter*) Bread and butter?

BLAKE. Thank you. (*Takes a bite; smiles at her. She smiles at him. Slight pause. They repeat business*) Homemade bread! Gee, I'm crazy about homemade bread! Why don't they have Christmas picnics?

BETH. Rather chilly. Taste good?

BLAKE. Did you cook it?

BETH. Oh, you can be honest about it.

BLAKE. Best ever. (*She gives him another small sandwich, which he looks at*) Aren't they wearin' the bread thin in sandwiches this year? (*She laughs. He looks into basket; she does same after him, twice*) Is that pie in there? (*Looking in together and raising head at same time*)

BETH. Yes.

BLAKE. What kind?

BETH. Mince.

BLAKE. Like Mother used to make?

BETH. Yes, have some?

BLAKE. No, I don't carry any life insurance.

BETH. Stupid not to have another glass, but I wasn't expecting company.

BLAKE. (*Getting bottle and glass out of basket, replacing untouched sandwich in basket*) Let's make it a loving cup. (*Cork is on a string, he flicks it with his fingers*) Say, isn't this clubby? (*He pours into glass, imitating soda-fountain clerk. He gives glass to* BETH, *she drinks, offers it to him; he twists glass around and drinks out of same spot*)

BETH. Have some celery? (*She gives him a very small piece*)

BLAKE. Hope I'm not robbing you? (*He picks the leaves off the stalk*) She loves me, she loves me not. (*Seeing wishbone in basket*) You gave me the wishbone. Will you wish with me? (*Wipes wishbone on napkin*)

BETH. I'm ready.

BLAKE. I wish I could eat this lunch every day.

BETH. Oh, you mustn't tell your wish.

BLAKE. Now you must not cheat, and you must pull as hard as I do. Now, when I say go—(*They break bone*) I've lost. (*Throws bone in basket*)

BETH. You didn't want to get it, did you? You'd hate to eat turkey every day.

BLAKE. I wouldn't if you gave it to me.

BETH. (*Looking at him*) See here, young man, are you trying to flirt with me? Nice return for charity to a——

BLAKE. (*Takes out card and cigarette case*) A drummer.

BETH. Oh, are you a drummer?

BLAKE. Don't I look the part? (*Taking out card*) What did you think I was? A tourist? Permit me. (*Hands card to her*) Do you mind if I smoke? (*Taking out cigarette and match.* BETH *points to "No smoking" sign; he looks at it*) Oh, I don't believe in signs.

BETH. You travel for Martin Drury. That's Mr. Royce's firm?

BLAKE. Yes, I've come down to sell Royce.

BETH. Oh, you're a friend of Mr. Royce's?

BLAKE. (*Lighting match*) Not exactly. Do you know him? Of course, that goes without saying. (*Puffs cigarette*) I suppose you meet everybody? (*Lighting cigarette and looking front*)

BETH. Because I am doing an unconventional thing now, doesn't mean that I "meet everybody"! (*He looks at her*) When I began to work here I felt that every man who asked me the price of a ticket should first be properly introduced. (*He smiles and leans forward*) But I've gotten over all that. A friend of mine—Mrs. Babbit, a dear sensible soul—called my attention to it; she didn't mince matters, she simply said, "Beth, any time you're better than your job, quit it." I came right down off my high horse. And do you know, I've

made some of my best friends right at that little window? (*Looking wistfully at window*)

BLAKE. (*Looking toward her*) What's a girl like you working for?

BETH. (*Lightly, turning front*) A living.

BLAKE. (*Sitting up straight*) Then the men in this town must be a lot of chumps.

BETH. Marriage, you mean? I've a better object than that in view.

BLAKE. Can a woman have a better object?

BETH. That depends on the object. (BLAKE *moving from her*) Personally, I prefer my independence and my property.

BLAKE. Your property?

BETH. (*Putting hand on chest*) You are lunching with a land proprietor.

BLAKE. (*Rising and bowing to her with a grandiloquent bow*) I appreciate the honor.

BETH. You don't believe me. See, I'm going to be sold up for taxes to-morrow. (*Points to placard*)

BLAKE. Sold up?

BETH. (*Arranging basket, putting in basket, etc.*) Um—um——

BLAKE. (*Going up to read notice of sale and puts out cigarette which he drops on floor*) It doesn't seem to worry you?

BETH. What do you want me to do, pull a long face and cry over it? I'd hoped to have paid the taxes by this time, but I was ill and was docked.

BLAKE. (*Turning to her*) Docked—the railroad company docked you? Cheap pikers! Will you lose your land? Tell me about it; where is it? (*Coming down to* C. *rear of bench* R.)

BETH. You've passed it on the way.

BLAKE. Oh, did I? I wasn't noticing very much.

BETH. (BLAKE *sits on up-stage bench, leans on back of it*) It isn't anything to look at; it lies

right along side of the railroad just outside of the Junction. It's always been called Elliott's Stone Pile. People around here think it isn't good for much, but my father struggled all his life to keep it for me. It meant days of work and nights of worry for him, and for me, self-denial, the sacrifice of all the little pleasure that other girls have had, all that makes a happy girlhood. It's all I have in the world. Isn't it funny my sitting here telling you my troubles, when I've no doubt you've loads of your own? How's trade? What's your line?

BLAKE. Women.

BETH. What?

BLAKE. Women's suits. (*Jumps up, goes to ticket-window facing front*) Say, I've some peachy samples—(*Coming to* L. *of bench* R.) some almost Paris styles. Come on over to the hotel and look them over.

BETH. (*Slowly*) I don't understand you, Mr. Blake? I wouldn't think you the kind of man to misjudge a woman. I'm not so unconventional as to visit you.

BLAKE. (*Turning to front*) In wrong again—and I never tried harder in my life to get in right.

BETH. It isn't the return I expected for a hospitable impulse. I don't really know why I did offer to share my lunch with you to day, except that I've had so many lonely Christmas's myself.

BLAKE. (*To* BETH) Do you think I would meaningly be careless of your feelings? That would be a snide return for a hospitality so kind that the recollection of it will be with me every Christmas of my life. May I call on you?

BETH. (*To* BLAKE) You see, I live in a boarding-house and—(*Looking front*) I don't know what Mrs. Tompkins would say if she knew how I met you. (*To* BLAKE) I'd have to tell her and

I'm afraid she wouldn't understand. You see there's such a prejudice against——

BLAKE. (*Interrupting*) Against drummers! (*Moving away to* C.) Give a dog a bad name.

BETH. (*Taking basket*) But I don't share that prejudice; I know lots of nice drummers. Why, I think you—(*Crossing to* C.)

BLAKE. (*Turning to her*) Yes? (*She turns front*)

BETH. Oh, nothing. (*Looking down*)

BLAKE. I'd like to know just what you think. (*Telegraph*)

BETH. (*Moving to office*) Oh, there's the key!

BLAKE. (*Stands still*) Say, that's a funny feeling—(*Hand to heart*) is it the turkey? (*Looks at bench* R., *then turns, sees* BETH *at window, she smiles*) Then I suppose I won't see you again? (*Going up to window* L., *facing* BETH)

BETH. Possibly—I'm going over to the Elite tonight to call on my friend Mrs. Babbit.

(*Enter* CRABB R. *door in flat.*)

BLAKE. But I don't know Mrs. Babbit.

CRABB. Young man, you're in luck.

(BLAKE *laughs loudly.* CRABB *exits to* R. 1 E.)

BLAKE. Where is the Elite?

BETH. I'm going that way; I'll show you, if I'm not taking up too much of your time——

BLAKE. Go on, take as much as you like. (BETH *puts on hat, looks at* BLAKE. BLAKE *going to bench puts on hat, looks at* BETH. *Puts on coat, singing;* BETH *puts on coat, closes window*) Blake, you've got it good! (*Crossing, picking up dress-suit case*)

BETH. (*Re-enters*) I'm ready. Heavy?

BLAKE. I feel so good I could carry the stove.
BETH. Here, let me show you. (*Puts his umbrella through handle of suit case*)
BLAKE. Oh, no!
BETH. Just to the corner.
BLAKE. Oh, well, I don't care. I could do this all day. (*Laughs.* BETH *laughs.* ROYCE *enters* R. *door flat, comes down to* C. BETH *stops.* BLAKE *turns*) Hello, Royce, Merry Christmas! (*Lifts hat to* ROYCE)

(BETH *and* BLAKE *exit, laughing, door* L. *in flat.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE:—BLAKE'S *room in the Elite Hotel.*

TIME:—*Christmas Night.*

It is the typical bedroom of a village hotel. Its walls are covered with a cheap and very ugly striped wall paper. The woodwork—originally white—is now dirty and discolored. BLAKE *has had all the furniture, with the exception of a large round table and half a dozen chairs, removed, and is using it as a sample room. At the rear of the stage, against the wall, and on either side of the door* C. *in back flat, and against the wall at* L., *are sample tables covered with unbleached muslin on which are placed in neat piles, women's coats and skirts of varied color and design. To them are affixed price tags. A woman's jacket hangs on a chair* L., *a second is suspended from the telephone receiver, a third from the electric button* R. *of door* C., *and a*

fourth from the electric light bracket on wall R. *A skirt is thrown carelessly over the upper end of the table* L. *On the lower end of this table are two books of samples. On the* L. *end of table of door* C. *is another skirt, and on the lid of the opened trunk at* R., *is a woman's ulster. At* R. 1 E. *and at* R. 3 E. *are windows at which are hung cheap lace curtains. On window at* R. 1 E. *is a rope attachment for use as in the event of fire. A steam radiator stands between the two windows. At* L. 3 *is a door to* BLAKE'S *bedroom. The door at* C. *gives on to the main hall. The backing is covered with a faded red wall paper. In this backing and exactly opposite the door* C. *to* BLAKE'S *room is a door to* MRS. BABBIT'S *room. The backing for this door represents the wall of another bedroom, covered with wall paper. From the ceiling hangs an old fashioned gas chandelier now wired for electricity. On the walls are landscape "chromos" in tawdry gilt frames. On the back of the door is tacked a card printed "Rules of the Hotel". On the floor is a cheap Ingrain carpet.*

AT RISE:—BLAKE *discovered in his shirt-sleeves. He is smoking a cigar, his arms full of clothing, which has evidently been taken out of a trunk in bedroom.*

(*Sings: "Nothing half so sweet in life as Love's young dream."*)

BLAKE. Sweet name, Beth! (*Goes* L. *whistling. There is a knock at the door*) Come in. (*Throws skirt on table* L. *Goes to sample table* L.)

(*Enter* TED WATTS, *a drummer, several years younger than* BLAKE; *he is* BLAKE'S *best pal.*

He has his hat tilted over his eyes, a cigar stuck in his mouth at an angle of fifty-five degrees; overcoat collar is turned up; his hand deep in his pocket. He is a picture of cold grouchiness.)

BLAKE. (*Down* L.) Hello, Wattsie, Merry Christmas!

WATTS. Merry Hell! (*He crosses to radiator, stands warming his back.* BLAKE *crossing a little to* C.)

BLAKE. Why the grouch?

WATTS. Why not the grouch? How'd you like to push on the reins for five miles behind a frost-bitten skate with everything from creeping paralysis to housemaid's knee. Then all the way back holding a couple of those cute little trunks—(*Points to sample trunks*) in your lap. What do you expect me to do—kiss you? (BLAKE *laughs*) Go on—laugh—ha—ha—(*Laughs sarcastically*)

BLAKE. I'm mighty sorry, old man. I got my trains mixed.

WATTS. (*Coming toward* L. *of table* R. C.) That's a nice little ingenue excuse. They ought to send you out with a guide. Where've you been? (*Coming down*)

BLAKE. (C.) I've—I've been—been delayed. I've been looking over the town.

WATTS. Cut that, you've been buzzin' a girl! (WATTS *sits* R.)

BLAKE. (C.) No, Watts, not a girl—*the* girl. (*Turning front*)

WATTS. (*Seated*) *The* girl? Now don't hand me that.

BLAKE. This one's different.

WATTS. Same old wheeze: they're all different at the beginning, but they're pretty much alike at the finish.

BLAKE. Who's tossed you? (*At chair* L. *of table*)

WATTS. Now, don't you lay awake nights over any skirt giving me the toss.

BLAKE. I won't—I've got nightmares of my own. (*Crosses to* L. *then to* C.) Won't you lay off your wraps and stay a while? (C.)

WATTS. And freeze to death. I'm not all warmed up by love's young dream, I'm still driving! (*He shivers and goes back to radiator.* BLAKE *crosses with samples to* L. *There is a knock at the door*)

BLAKE. Come in.

(*Enter* JULIUS, *a colored porter. He is carrying a pitcher of ice-water. The ice clinks against the pitcher.*)

JULIUS. Ice water, sir. (*Offering to* BLAKE; BLAKE *points to* WATTS. JULIUS *offers water to* WATTS. WATTS *picks up chair, and starts for* JULIUS. JULIUS *exits keeping eye on* WATTS, *closing the door softly*)

(BLAKE *crossing to* L.—*laughing—throws skirt on table* L.)

BLAKE. I see to that Jasper's house trouble. Had your supper?

WATTS. (*Facing radiator*) Everything was out when I struck the dining-room. Had yours?

BLAKE. Wasn't very hungry. Had the lunch of my life to-day.

WATTS. In Grand Crossing? Who staked you? (*Looking at* BLAKE)

BLAKE. Sh—sh—little boys shouldn't ask questions! I was mighty glad to get your wire saying you'd meet me here.

WATTS. Like you to pick out this God-forsaken hole. (*Moves down* L.)

BLAKE. Oh, it isn't so forsaken. (*Song "Oh, there's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream"*) Say, Watts, do you believe in love?

WATTS. Love! (*Laughing*) Change your dope.

BLAKE. Love at first sight.

WATTS. (*Imitating* BLAKE) Love at first sight!

BLAKE. You're a natural born echo.

WATTS. You've been reading fairy tales! Love at first sight! (*Laughs*)

BLAKE. Don't encore yourself. (WATTS *laughing, crosses to* R. *to table*) No, and I'm not batty.

WATTS. That girl's got you going.

BLAKE. Going—I'm gone! (*Looking front*)

WATTS. What, Blake, the prize con?

BLAKE. The kidder from Kiddersville. Go on, say it.

WATTS. This is immense; this is too good to keep! (*Starting across to phone* L.) I've got to put the boys wise to this.

BLAKE. Any of the boys in town? (*As* WATTS *goes to phone, takes down receiver*)

WATTS. (*At phone*) Yes, Kimball and old Cobb are here doing penance for their crimes. Is this the office? Ask Mr. Kimball and Mr. Cobb to join Mr. Blake and Mr. Watts. (*Louder*) Yes—this room. (*Comes to* L. *of* BLAKE)

BLAKE. See here, Watts, I'm strong for a joke even when I'm the goat, but this isn't a joke. I'll stand for your kidding but I don't care to be joshed by Kimball and old Cobb. (*Turns front*)

WATTS. Oh, as bad as that, eh?

BLAKE. (*Looking front*) She's the only thought in my head.

WATTS. Oh, well, if that's the way you feel about it.

BLAKE. That's the way I feel about it. (WATTS *starts to door*) Oh, come on, Watts, now don't get huffy. Stick around, the boys will be here in a minute, and we'll get up a little game.

WATTS. (*Coming down* L.) Not on your existence. I'm not going to sit here an' play freeze out. You've induced a yearning for a little feminine society. Wonder if that little milliner's here? (*He takes out a little red pocket memorandum book*) G. G.—Grand Crossing—Here it is—Minnie Conway —Main Street—Telephone 43. Suppose I call her up an' see if she hasn't a friend?

BLAKE. (*Crosses* R.) Nix with Minnie! (*Moving across to table* R.) I'm not going to cheapen my recollections of Beth Elliott with any of your village Salomes! Watts, for the first time in many moons I'm jerry to myself. (*Leaning against front of table*)

WATTS. How?

BLAKE. (*Leaning back against table*) She didn't want me to call on her. I felt just a little bit ashamed. She thought her landlady might want to sidestep a drummer.

WATTS. (L. *of* C.) I like her nerve and yours, too! Ashamed of being a drummer!

BLAKE. No, ashamed of myself—of the way I've helped to make the name "drummer" stand for dallying by the wayside. It's an awful thing, Wattsie, to think that if a drummer heaves in sight all the old ladies yell, "Run, daughter, the Indians are upon us."

WATTS. (*Breaking in*) Oh, I guess we're no worse than any other men. What in blazes are we going to do? Look at the life we lead—no home—no women-folks! (*Looking down, with cigar in* R. *hand*)

BLAKE. (*At table*) I know, Wattsie, it's pretty hard keepin' a strangle-hold on home-ties when you only see your home about twice a year.

WATTS. (L. C.) That's right. You don't think I'm stuck on this red book, do you? But—(*Putting it back in pocket*) I wasn't brought up to be lonesome.

BLAKE. I'm strong for company, too, (*Moving* R. *to chair*) but if I thought I had half a chance with that girl—all the others to the discard! (*Sis* R. *of table*)

WATTS. (*Crossing, sits* L. *of table, astride of chair*) Say, she must be a peach.

BLAKE. Peach? She's the whole orchard, but no goo-goo eyes about her. Just a sweet, brave little girl, not holding down a job to get a few glad rags. Isn't on the lookout to make a few flash acquaintances. Just working like you and I to keep the pot boiling. (*Looking front*) She has some land that's to be sold up, and she's working to pay off the taxes. (*Looking at* WATTS) Can't you understand? I respect her.

WATTS. Why don't you put up a talk to her?

BLAKE. (*Back in chair*) I wonder if she'd believe me?

WATTS. That's the devil of having a reputation.

BLAKE. Yes, Wattsie, us and the soubrettes—when we are on the level who believes us?

WATTS. Oh, what's the use! Let's have a drink—

BLAKE. Sure, I'm so dry my hoops are falling off. (*Rise*) Tell them to send up a boy.

(WATTS *goes to telephone.* BLAKE *crosses* L., *whistling.*)

WATTS. (*At phone*) This the office? Send up the boy. (*Going down* L.)

(*A knock at the door. Enter* KIMBALL, *a man of about thirty-five; also* COBB, *a man about* ***fifty, gray hair.*** *They are very gloomy.*)

BLAKE. (*Shaking hands cordially*) Hello, Kimball! (KIMBALL *goes to* R. *above table, throws hat on it*) Hello, Cobb, you old sight for sore eyes! How goes it? Merry Xmas.

KIMBALL. (*Irritably*) Merry Xmas; what in blazes is the matter with you? (*Goes down* R. *of table and sits*)

WATTS. (*Drops down* L.) He's full of glad tidings.

COBB. I don't know the brand, but me for it! I don't care what I'm full of, so I'm full. (*Sitting* L. *of table*)

(*A knock at the door.*)

BLAKE. Come in. (*Enter* JULIUS C., *comes* C. BLAKE C.) I don't want the porter, I want the bell-boy.

JULIUS. I'se the bell-boy.

BLAKE. Then send up a waiter.

JULIUS. I'se dat, too.

BLAKE. I guess you're the whole works?

JULIUS. I'se the staff of the Elite.

BLAKE. Drinks for a large party!

JULIUS. Can't serve no drinks, boss.

(KIMBALL, WATTS *and* COBB *look at* JULIUS.)

BLAKE. What kind of a stall are you giving me?

JULIUS. 'Tain't no stall, it's a solemn fac': clerk downstairs won't allow it.

BLAKE. You go down and tell that harp in the office that the gentleman in 25 has a chill; make it four chills.

JULIUS. The bar done shut down last night.

COBB. Julius, haven't you a private stock?

JULIUS. No, sir, I never drinks durin' office hours.

BLAKE. (*Taking a half dollar*) Julius, what could you do for that?

JULIUS. (*Grinning*) Most anything, sir.

WATTS. Think—(*Holding up half dollar*)

(BLAKE *takes* WATT'S *coin.*)

KIMBALL. (*Holding up half a dollar*) Think hard!

(COBB *takes* KIMBALL'S *coin* L. *table.*)

COBB. (*Holding up half dollar*) Think quickly. (*Shaking coins, etc.*)

BLAKE. (*Shaking it in his hands*) Listen.

JULIUS. Well, gentlemen, you're all mighty persuasive. (BLAKE *gives* JULIUS *money;* COBB *does same*) I might get you something.

ALL. *Ah!*

JULIUS. I might get you some tea.

COBB. (*Turns quickly to* JULIUS) Tea!

(WATTS *jumping forward to* C. BLAKE *holds him.* JULIUS, *frightened, runs up-stage.*)

JULIUS. (*Coming down*) I think you might all be partial to this brand of tea. Guess you never drunk none a my Scotch breakfast tea. (*They all laugh*)

KIMBALL. Now, you're shouting!

BLAKE. Vamp! (*Making exit door* L., *gets coat*)

WATTS. And vamp quick.

COBB. Bring me a double portion.

(JULIUS *exits.* KIMBALL *sits* R. *of table.*)

WATTS. (*Gloomily*) Of all the holes to spend Christmas in!

(*Crossing up* R. *to back of card-table; takes off coat and hat, leaving them on sample tables; going up for chair up* R.)

KIMBALL. Of all the hotels to make you think of a misspent life!

COBB. The suicides' rest!

KIMBALL. It's the rottenest-run place! Why, there's even no mail delivery.

COBB. I can put up with that. (*Enter* BLAKE *from room* L.) It's no drink delivery that worries me.

WATTS. (*Bringing chair to back of table, and standing by it*) Now, Kimball, cut out that rave about mail; Cobb and I have had it all day.

BLAKE. What's the matter, Kimball? Short of money? I've a few loose rags here I can loan you. (*Getting out money*)

WATTS. No, he's short of sentiment: he hasn't heard from home. Oh, these married men! (*Back of table and sits*)

BLAKE. Sorry, Kimball, couldn't you make it? (*By chair at back of table*)

KIMBALL. No, got snowed in up the road; met up with Cobb and came here.

COBB. Wait until I see that man who recommended this one-eyed town.

KIMBALL. It's the first Christmas I've been away from the little woman.

WATTS. Then what are you kicking about? It's so long since I've been home on Christmas.

BLAKE. (*After a pause*) Oh, well, boys, they're thinking about us! (*Pokes* COBB *in back. To* COBB) Well, old boots and shoes, how goes it? (*Sits*)

COBB. Oh, not so worse; how are the ladies?

BLAKE. Styles still changing, thank God. (*Sits*)

COBB. (*Loudly*) Say, where's that boy?

JULIUS. (*Off-stage*) Here comes de boy, here

comes de boy! (*Enter with tray and cups, seltzer bottle and whiskey in teapot*)

BLAKE. Julius, get the cigars.

JULIUS. Yes, sir, yes, sir. (*Exits* L.)

KIMBALL. (*To* BLAKE) Going to sell this town?

BLAKE. Hardly. (*Business looking in teapot, etc.; all laugh*) Drury has a man down here. (*Pouring tea*) I've really brought down a bunch of truck for him to look over. Say, you must know our man here: Royce.

KIMBALL. Royce? Franklin Royce? There must he has the meal-ticket privilege here.

WATTS. Let's have him in. I don't like him, but we're a man shy. Call him up, Blake, it's your party. You're friends, aren't you?

BLAKE. Just as chummy as a pair of panthers. (*To* JULIUS, *who enters* L. *with box of cigars and ash-tray, putting them on table*) Julius!

JULIUS. Yes, sir?

BLAKE. Does Mr. Royce live here?

JULIUS. (*Coming* C.) He doesn't exactly live here: he has a room over Mrs. Stratton's store, but he has the meal-ticket privilege here.

ALL. Poor Royce!

BLAKE. Well, you run across and tell him Mr. Blake and some friends would like to have him come over here. (*Throws* JULIUS *a coin*)

JULIUS. (*At door, bites coin,* BLAKE *catches him. Quick exit*) Yes, sir, yes, sir.

(*The men draw up to table.*)

BLAKE. (*Ladylike manner. With cup in his hand—to* WATTS) Two lumps, Clara.

WATTS. (*Same manner*) No thanks, Maud.

(BLAKE *fills out cup with seltzer.*)

BLAKE. (*Same manner. To* COBB) How will you have yours, dearest?

COBB. (*Same manner*) Strong, damn you!

(BLAKE *fills up a cup for* COBB.)

BLAKE. (*Fills up cup for* KIMBALL; WATTS *takes it. To* WATTS) Pass this to the chaperone.

WATTS. (*To* KIMBALL) Here, you old hen. (*Putting cup beside* KIMBALL)

COBB. Drink it, Kimball; it's good for what ails you.

BLAKE. If you haven't got it, it will give it to you.

WATTS. To us, God help us!

BLAKE. To us, who's like us—damn few!

ALL. To us! (*All drink*)

KIMBALL. To the absent, God Bless 'em!

ALL. (*All drink*) To the absent!

(BLAKE *fills cup.*)

KIMBALL. Mighty funny I didn't hear from home!

COBB. He's off again.

BLAKE. (*Filling up cups again with tea*)

Here's to the man who loves his wife,
And loves his wife alone.
For many a man loves another man's wife,
When he ought to be loving his own.

(*All drink to* KIMBALL.)

KIMBALL. Here, you're getting one in on me. (*Taking his cup*)

Here's to good old whiskey,
So amber and so clear.
It's not so sweet as a woman's lips.
But a blamed sight more sincere.

COBB. You old reprobate!

BLAKE. Trying to square yourself!

WATTS. Oh, that's one of those good husbands' bluffs. Blake, this is for you.

Here's to the man who stops to pause,
Before he takes a wife.
In fact I see no earthly cause,
Why he shouldn't pause for life.

BLAKE. (*Rising*) Coming right back at you.

Here's to the girl I love,
I wish that she were nigh!
If drinking this would bring her here,
I'd drink the whole place dry.

COBB. You're getting mushy!

Here's to all good fellows,
We go out of this world, we know not where.
But if we're good fellows here.
We'll be thoroughbreds there.

(*Starts to sing.*)

We're all such jolly good fellows——

(*They all join in. The song began in a loud jolly key, gradually dying out. They all sit staring in front of them gloomily. A pause.*)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Off*) Is this the office? Has a respectable woman to be kept awake all night by a pack of drunken rowdies!

(*All laugh.*)

BLAKE. All right, sister, we'll be good.

(*There is a knock heard off-stage center.*)

KIMBALL. This is no place for a minister's son! (*Crosses to* R.)

(COBB *places cup on tray; crosses to* R. *of table.* WATTS *crossing to* L. *by* C. *door. Knock.* BLAKE *goes to door and throws it open.* BETH ELLIOTT *is standing knocking at* MRS. BABBIT'S *door across the hall.* BETH *turns.*)

BLAKE. Oh, good-evening, Miss Elliott.

BETH. Good-evening, Mr. Blake. (*They shake hands*)

WATTS. It's the girl at the depot; he's bug-house about her.

BLAKE. I'm afraid we've disturbed your friend, Mrs. Babbit.

(BETH *knocks again.* MRS. BABBIT *appears.*)

MRS. BABBIT. Oh, it's you, deary.

(BLAKE *points to tray on table.*)

WATTS. (*Pointing*) Cobb, the tray.

(COBB *snatches coat from trunk, covers tray with it.*)

BETH. (*Outside*) Mrs. Babbit, let me present Mr. Blake.

BLAKE. I'm sorry we annoyed you. Won't you come in and let my friends apologize. (BLAKE *and* MRS. BABBIT *enter.* BETH *stays in door*) Boys, this is Mrs. Babbit—Mrs. Babbit, Mr. Watts, Mr. Kimball, Mr. Cobb.

(COBB, *who has grabbed the seltzer siphon, hides it*

behind his back as he makes deep bow, then hides it behind trunk.)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Coming down a little*) Pleased to meet you.

KIMBALL. Afraid our Christmas carols annoyed you.

MRS. BABBIT. That's all right, gentlemen.

BLAKE. (*To* BETH *in* C. *door*) Won't you come in? (BETH *enters*) Miss Elliott, the boys——

BETH. Pleased to meet the boys. (*Sees coat over tray*) Oh, what lovely clothes!

(WATTS *grabs skirt off table back* L., *holds it up, attracting* MRS. BABBIT'S *attention.* KIMBALL *picks up coat on back of chair* L. *Brushes it.* COBB *rushes up back of table, grabs skirt, comes down* L. *of table, intercepts* BETH *and displays skirt to her.*)

BLAKE. Guess it's a pretty good line.

BETH. (*Turning to* BLAKE) Don't you know?

COBB. You don't have to know anything about goods to sell 'em.

(BLAKE *bows to* COBB.)

BLAKE. Mrs. Babbit, it was very rude of me to call you sister, but now that I've seen you, I wish I had that privilege.

MRS. BABBIT. Ain't you awful? (*Makes playful slap at* BLAKE. BLAKE *imitates her*)

WATTS. (*To* KIMBALL) He could talk a duck off the water.

BETH. Oh, isn't this a dear? (*Starts for coat on table again*)

BLAKE. (*Getting blue skirt from sample table back, coming down* C.) Now, I like blue.

(WATTS *showing skirt on himself.*)

MRS. BABBIT. (*To* BLAKE) Are you wearing hobble skirts in New York?

BLAKE. Yes, and we look great in 'em.

MRS. BABBIT. You're a terrible cut-up.

BLAKE. Now, sister—(*Throwing blue skirt up back on sample table*)

MRS. BABBIT. I'm having a three-piece suit made. I always design my own clothes. (*Going down-stage* C. KIMBALL *laughs loudly.* MRS. BABBIT *gives him a look and he stops*)

BLAKE. Is that one of your creations?

MRS. BABBIT. Oh, it's just a little thing I run up. (*Walks up and down stage displaying gown*)

WATTS. You're certainly a grand little designer.

MRS. BABBIT. Oh, Mr. Watts!

BETH. It isn't really anything to what she can do.

MRS. BABBIT. Now, Beth.

BLAKE. I'd like to see her when she gets going.

MRS. BABBIT. Oh, Mr. Blake!

JULIUS. (*Enters*) Here is your tea, gentlemen.

(MRS. BABBIT *and* BETH *turn to look at* JULIUS. COBB *snatches a coat off sample table attracts* BETH'S *attention.* WATTS *grasps* MRS. BABBIT'S *arm rushes her down to* L., *grabs coat from* KIMBALL, *then using* KIMBALL *as model;* KIMBALL *puts right arm through coat,* MRS. BABBIT *admires it.*)

BLAKE. Tea—who ordered tea? Take it away! (*Throwing* JULIUS *out. Whispers*) Bring it back later.

JULIUS. Yes, sir,—yes, sir. (*Exits*)

MRS. BABBIT. Mr. Blake, you haven't anything in a middle-aged Fluffy Ruffles.

(BLAKE *nearly falls backward.*)

BLAKE. Why, yes, in the other room. Watts, show Mrs. Babbit my line of Fluffy Ruffles. There are several that would just suit your ready-to-wear figure.

(WATTS, *furious, throws skirt on table* L. KIMBALL *amused.*)

MRS. BABBIT. I'd certainly like to inspect them, Mr. Blake, but I don't know that it would be hardly proper.

WATTS. Oh, quit your kidding, sister. (MRS. BABBIT *exits door* R.)

BLAKE. Kimball, go in and chaperone Mrs. Babbit. (KIMBALL, *furious, throws coat on table* L. COBB *laughs loudly*) Cobb, you chaperone them, too.

(WATTS *laughs.* COBB *and* KIMBALL *exit door* L., *glaring at* BLAKE.)

WATTS. Say, what are you giving me?

(BLAKE *pushes* WATTS *off. All exit.*)

BLAKE. (*Coming* C.) You're on, eh?

BETH. I'm not blind.

BLAKE. I've simply got to have a half a minute alone with you.

BETH. Then time's up.

BLAKE. I was afraid you weren't coming.

BETH. Were you really?

BLAKE. No, I knew you would.

BETH. (*Coming down a little*) Oh, did you?

BLAKE. I'm clean foolish about you.

BETH. (*She moves coat from over tray, crossing*

to R. *front of table*) Oh, isn't this a love! (*Crossing to table*) I adore red. (*Turning round right*)

BLAKE. So do I.

BETH. But you said you liked blue? (*Picking up coat sees cups*)

BLAKE. (Well, it makes a difference who's wearing blue! (BETH *picks up the cup and looks over the brim at him, laughing*) We were having a cup of tea.

BETH. (*Smelling cup*) Tea?

BLAKE. Oh, well, the boys were blue and I wanted to cheer them up with a dash of red. Away from home, you know.

BETH. (*Putting down cup*) I don't blame them. (*Turing front*)

BLAKE. Do you know you're an awful understanding kind of a girl. (*Going over towards her*) I guess I never woke up until to-day to what it means to have a home and somebody you liked pretty well —passing things across the table to you. It must be great as a steady diet!

BETH. Do you mind if I try on this coat?

BLAKE. Do I mind? Try on the bunch; can I help you? (*He hands her the coat*)

BETH. Thanks. It is lovely, isn't it? (*Picking up sample coat, holding it between them*)

BLAKE. It isn't a marker to what it will be on! Allow me! (*Helping her on with coat*)

BETH. Thanks. Oh, I do love pretty things. (*Looking at* BLAKE)

BLAKE. So do I.

BETH. Do you? (*Looks down—she turns away* R.)

BLAKE. Crazy about them. It's mighty becoming to you.

BETH. Do you think so? (*Turns*) Why, if it weren't for those old taxes, I might buy it. Get thee behind me, Satan! (*Moving towards* BLAKE, *taking off coat;* BLAKE *helps her*)

BLAKE. (*Laying coat on table, back to audience*) You're mighty plucky to resist all the temptations of pretty clothes and make a fight for your land. How much do you owe on it?

BETH. You're the second man who's asked me that to-day. Mr. Royce——

BLAKE. (*Interrupting*) Royce, what has he got to do with it?

BETH. Oh, nothing.

BLAKE. You aren't going to let *him* help you?

BETH. I don't need anyone's help.

BLAKE. Aren't you afraid someone might buy it in to-morrow?

BETH. I won't lose my beauty-sleep over that.

BLAKE. I've been thinking an awful lot about you, have you?

BETH. Thinking about myself. I'm not a bit conceited. (*Moving away, right*)

BLAKE. I meant about me.

BETH. About you?

BLAKE. Well, what have you been doing since I saw you last?

BETH. (*Over near table* R.) As that was only a few hours ago——

BLAKE. Is it? It seems longer. That was a great walk we had to-day. What are you going to do to-morrow?

BETH. Work.

BLAKE. I don't suppose we could have another cozy little chat. I'm not very gabby as a rule—(*She gives him a look as if contradicting him*)—but I like to talk to you. Did you ever feel you had known somebody, you had just met, for years and years and years?

BETH. Yes, once——

BLAKE. (*Anxiously turning to her*) Who—Royce?

BETH. No: Mrs. Babbit. (BLAKE *leans against table in relief*) I liked her the minute I saw her.

BLAKE. (*Walks up to* L. C.) It never happened to me before. (*Turning front*) Say, do you believe in love at first sight?

BETH. Yes, my mother fell in love with father that way. (*Comes to table*)

BLAKE. (*Going quickly to table, only part way*) I'd have liked your mother.

BETH. They were married in a week's time.

BLAKE. I'd have liked your father, too. (*Landing by her at table*) He's just my kind of man. I always knew it would strike me this way. How do you feel about it?

BETH. About what?

BLAKE. What we were talking about?

BETH. Oh, the coat. (*Picking it up*)

BLAKE. The coat? No. (*Taking coat from her* L. *of table—throwing it on chair*) I mean love.

BETH. Were we talking about love?

BLAKE. I've been doing my level best.

BETH. Why, are you in love?

BLAKE. Aren't you?

BETH. With whom?

BLAKE. His name begins with B.

BETH. Why, Mr. Blake! (*Turning away to* R.)

BLAKE. (*Coming to her*) You've guessed it. Make it Bob, won't you?

BETH. I think I should be going home——

BLAKE. Oh, what's your hurry?

BETH. Won't you give me my coat, please?

(BLAKE *takes coat from table. Assists her to put it on.*)

BLAKE. Why, you aren't mad, are you?

(BETH *looks down shyly. A knock at the door.* ROYCE *enters on knock.*)

ROYCE. Oh, I'm afraid I'm in the way?

BLAKE. (*Turning sharply on him*) You—

(BETH *stops* BLAKE. *Pause.*)

BETH. Mrs. Babbit—Mrs. Babbit—(*Coming to* C.)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Off*) Yes, dearie?

BETH. (*Going up* R. *to sample table*) I think we had better go.

(*Enter* MRS. BABBIT, *followed by* WATTS, COBB *and* KIMBALL. BLAKE *takes coat from chair* L. *of table.*)

MRS. BABBIT. Oh, they've the grandest clothes—(*Crossing to* R., *snubbing* ROYCE)

WATTS. Hello, Royce—you've met Kimball? You know Cobb—(*Going down* L. KIMBALL *and* COBB *shake hands with* ROYCE) Glad we got you: we needed another hand for——

BLAKE. (*Interrupting* R. *of table; snapping fingers*) Old maid!

ROYCE. I'm afraid I can't join you.

WATTS. Sure you can, eh, Blake?

(BLAKE *turns as though to say "No". BETH looks at him.*)

BLAKE. I hope Royce will give us the pleasure of his company. (*Crossing to* R. *putting coat on trunk*)

BETH. (*To* BLAKE) Good-night. (*Going to door* C.—*to others*) Good-night, gentlemen.

COBB. No: "boys" to us——

BETH. Well, good-night, boys—(*Exits* C. *door and into* MRS. BABBIT'S *room—snubbing* ROYCE)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Starting to go* C. *door*) Good-night, boys.

ALL. Good-night, sister.

MRS. BABBIT (*Stops*) Oh, I've something you might use in that game of Old Maid.

BLAKE. Yes?

MRS. BABBIT. Mr. Babbit left me a real nice lot of poker chips. (*Exits* C. *door—all laugh*)

(ROYCE *is taking off overcoat.*)

BLAKE. Kimball, will you get the cards? You'll find chips on the dresser.

(*Exit* KIMBALL *door* L.)

COBB. Let's get comfortable. (*Takes off coat and cuffs, putting them on sample table* L.)

WATTS. Comfortable, got any ear muffs? (*Wiping off table*) Where will I put this booze?

BLAKE. Put it handy. (*Brings table down—* WATTS *puts tray on small table, back*)

COBB. (*Going to phone*) Anything left, Watts?

WATTS. If I squeeze it a little. (*Looking in teapot*) Have a drink, Royce?

ROYCE. I've had a few, but still I don't mind another one. (*Staggers. Coming down and round* R *of table, he sits*)

(BLAKE *and* WATTS *watch him.*)

WATTS. (*To* BLAKE) Quite a bun——

BLAKE. Bun, he's carrying the whole bakery! (*Lighting cigar. During* COBB's *phone,* WATTS *pours out drink for* ROYCE)

COBB. Is this the office? Oh, that you, Julius? *Tea* for five. (*Crossing to card-table*)

WATTS. If you don't mind my cup. (*Crossing round to* R. *of card-table, putting cup at* ROYCE's *place*)

BLAKE. What's it going to be, all Jacks?

(KIMBALL *enters, bringing chips and cards; gets chair and carries it to table.*)

COBB. No, make it straight poker, ten cent ante. (*Lights cigar*)

WATTS. Fifty cent limit.

ROYCE. Suits me.

KIMBALL. (*Sits*) I'm on. Who's banker? (*Gives* BLAKE *chips*)

BLAKE. (*Begins to take out chips*) I'll bank.

ROYCE. Got any new stories, Watts?

WATTS. (*Taking cards out of case*) Heard the one about the chorus girl and the million dollar legacy?

ROYCE. New to me.

BLAKE. Nix, they might hear you across the hall. (*Gives chips to* KIMBALL)

WATTS. (*Looks at transom, etc.*) All right. (*Lowering his voice*) Some chorus girls talking in a dressing room——

BLAKE. (*Interrupting*) Cut it out, I haven't got a laugh left in me for one of your funny stories. (*Gives chips to* COBB)

WATTS. Oh, very well! Cobb, will you lead us in prayer.

(BLAKE *gives chips to* ROYCE—*all laugh.*)

ROYCE. This is like old times. Haven't played in so long. (*Chip to* WATTS)

COBB. Kind of hanker for the road, eh? (*Counting chips*)

ROYCE. (*Counting chips*) Occasionally.

WATTS. (*Counting chips*) Oh, it's a glad bad career!

BLAKE. This leading the sample life. (*Puts chip box on floor. Others groan at the pun*)

(KIMBALL *counts chips.*)

COBB. (*Sitting back in chair*) Still working for that old pirate Drury?

BLAKE. (*Making record of chips on envelope*) See here, Cobb, Drury hardly runs in the pirate class; he makes money but he does a lot of good.

COBB. Yes, he does a lot and does 'em good.

BLAKE. He's always been on the level with me.

COBB. It's to his interest, then. Martin and I sold goods together and, well—I wouldn't bank on him—it's money first, last and always with Martin.

ROYCE. Mr Drury will be here to-morrow. Why don't you stay over and *reminisce* together? (*Makes bad pronunciation*)

COBB. No, Martin and I have gone different ways, and some of the recollections might be painful.

BLAKE. (*Throwing cards around face up. Three queens should come up in the deal*) First Jack deals.

WATTS. (*After first five cards are dealt*) Who pinched the Jacks?

BLAKE. Don't seem to be anything in this deck but typewriters! (*Deals to* ROYCE. *Jack appears*) Your cards, Royce; let's open with a Jack anyway.

ALL. All right. (*All ante one white chip, except* KIMBALL)

COBB. Everybody up.

WATTS. Oh, put up, Kimball, put up.

BLAKE. Come on, Kimball, decorate the mahogany.

KIMBALL. Excuse me. (*Puts in one white chip*)

COBB. Yes, siree. Martin's a wise old owl—used to play a bully game. (ROYCE *puts cards over for* COBB *to cut them*) Royce, did you start with Drury? (*Cutting cards*)

ROYCE. Yes, Blake and I started with him about the same time. (*Starts to deal*)

BLAKE. Oh, he's Martin's white-haired boy.

WATTS. Why didn't you cuddle up to him?

BLAKE. When it comes to cuddlin' up to the boss I'm a few chips shy.

ROYCE. Drury thinks a great deal of Blake.

BLAKE. That's real sweet of Drury.

ROYCE. Blake wasn't handed as good a territory as me.

BLAKE. And my business methods didn't make as much of a hit with the firm as yours. (*Puts cigar on tray.* ROYCE *finishes deal*)

ROYCE. The firm think very well of you, Blake. (*Turns, facing audience*)

WATTS. Why don't you have that little testimonial framed?

BLAKE. (*Looking at cards*) Good idea. "To whom it may concern: The bearer, Robert Blake, has always been sober, industrious, neat in appearance, and (*Looking over cards at* ROYCE) kept his hands clean."

(*All have cards up. Looking at them they exchange glances.* ROYCE, *noticing it, looks at* BLAKE. BLAKE *is oblivious.*)

WATTS. (1 *red*) Me for it.

BLAKE. (1 *red*) I'll trail.

COBB. (*Noticing* KIMBALL *who does not come in*) Well——

BLAKE. (*Softly*) Sh—don't wake him—(*Yells in his ear*) Oh, Kimball!

KIMBALL. (1 *red*) I'll come in.

COBB. (1 *red*) I'm there.

ROYCE. (1 *red*) I'm with you. How many? (*Dealing again*)

WATTS. Three.

BLAKE. To my house a dark man with a bundle—(*All laugh*) An ace, please.

KIMBALL. Two.

COBB. (*In reminiscint vein*) The last game I sat in was in Tacoma——

BLAKE. (*interrupting*) But we're in Grand Crossing. Git ap.

COBB. (*Angrily*) Three.

ROYCE. Three to the dealer!

WATTS. (1 *red*) This looks good to muh.

BLAKE. I don't mind contributing a little bird seed. (1 *red. Pause—all notice* KIMBALL) Oh, Kimball, do you want to play poker, or sleep? Make up your mind.

KIMBALL. That's what I'm doing.

WATTS. Don't annoy him, Blake, he's got such a lot of mind to make up. (*Laugh from others*)

KIMBALL. (2 *reds*) Just for that, buck this.

COBB. Since you urge me, gentlemen. (3 *reds*)

ROYCE. I'm out. (*Throws down hand*)

WATTS. Oh, crullers! (*Throws down hand*)

BLAKE. Oh, this is as easy as stealing a dog license from a pup! Once again, please. (2 *blue chips. Pause—all impatient. To* KIMBALL) Oh, come on, Philadelphia.

KIMBALL. I'll raise. Got any more of that bird seed? (3 *blues*)

COBB. Oh, if you want a sprint for your money, I'll go you all one better. (4 *blues*)

BLAKE. You've got my tag. (*Throws down cards*)

KIMBALL. I've got the habit. I'll tilt you once more. (2 *blues*)

COBB. Let's see your picture-book. What've you got? (1 *blue*)

KIMBALL. Kings up.

COBB. Kings up here. What's next.

KIMBALL. Sevens.

COBB. Fours. (*Throws cards on table—all laugh etc.*)

BLAKE. Suckers.

WATTS. My card. Let's make 'em all Jacks. (*Shuffling*)

ALL. All right. (*All chip* I *white except* KIMBALL)

ROYCE. Kimball, going to sell this town?

(BLAKE *picks up cigar.*)

KIMBALL. Don't believe they'd be interested in rubber goods.

WATTS. (*Shuffling cards*) I think some of those London checks might just hit Grand Crossing's natty dressers.

BLAKE. Grand Crossing's getting natty, eh?

WATTS. Natty! You should have seen the line of fancy hosiery and neckwear I planted.

COBB. Lots of loose change, eh?

WATTS. Worse than that. Steinberg laid in a line of pyjamas. (*Places cards for* ROYCE)

COBB. (ROYCE *cuts cards*) Rubes in pyjamas! (*All laugh*)

KIMBALL. You ought to be selling gold bricks.

BLAKE. Where do they get it?

(WATTS *begins to deal.*)

COBB. Grand Crossing. Isn't there a boom on down here? I heard the railway was going to put in a spur or something.

WATTS. These yaps don't know that.

ROYCE. (*Turning towards* COBB) Where'd you hear that, Cobb?

COBB. One of the road surveyors was telling me the other day. Looks good for you, Royce.

(WATTS *finishes deal*)

ROYCE. (*Anxiously*) What do you mean, Cobb?

COBB. Ought to help trade.

ROYCE. (*Smiles*) Oh—(*Sitting back in chair*)

BLAKE. Kimball, hand me a match.

KIMBALL. Move, and change my luck.

COBB. (*Throws down cards*) No wonder I'm up against it: I got my left shoe laced. (*Unties lace*)

WATTS. Well, my luck can't be worse, still—(*Getting up and walking around chair*) every little bit helps. (*He looks at cards*) Oh, Lord! (*He gets up and runs rapidly around the chair several times in the other direction*)

BLAKE. Sit down—sit down—you make me dizzy! (1 *blue*) I'll bust this for fifty cents. (*Rises to turn for drinks on table*)

COBB. Who's shy?

BLAKE. (*Takes one white chip from* KIMBALL'S *pile*) Kimball, would you like to leave a call?

(*All laugh.*)

COBB. Lucky you aren't playing in Tacoma!

(*All chip* 1 *blue as they draw.*)

KIMBALL. (1 *blue*) Two.

COBB. (1 *blue*) Three.

ROYCE. (1 *blue*) Same here.

BLAKE. How many did the dealer take?

WATTS. (1 *blue*) Three.

BLAKE. It's as good as it was before. I'll bet fifty cents. (1 *blue*)

KIMBALL. (*Quickly*) I'll stick and then some. (*2 blues*)

BLAKE. Bully for Kimball! That was nice and quick.

COBB. (*Reminiscing again*) Now, that's funny—I sat in a game——

BLAKE. (*Interrupting*) We know, in Tacoma.

COBB. (*Angrily. 2 blues*) Oh, well, I'm there.

ROYCE. Well, I guess it's worth another dollar. (3 *blues*)

(WATTS *comes in.* JULIUS *enters with tray and five cups—one to break.*)

COBB. (*To* JULIUS) Well, it's about time.

BLAKE. Julius, speed that booze around. Boys, I'll just raise that five hundred dollars. (*Winks at boys, etc.—all amused*) How are you, Julius?

(JULIUS *astounded, puts cup down.* BLAKE 1 *white.*)

KIMBALL. Cobb, if you want any of this it will cost you two of those five-hundred dollars boys. (2 *whites*) Good-evening, Julius.

(JULIUS *puts down cup—more amazed; goes round to* R. *of card-table with cup for* ROYCE.)

COBB. Oh, don't be a piker. Why don't you bet something? We'll make it an even two thousand. How de do, Julius? (4 *whites*—JULIUS *confused starts out window, then goes up back of table to* R.)

(ROYCE *and* WATTS *lay down cards.*)

BLAKE. (1 *blue*) I hate this playing with children. This chip means five thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine.

(JULIUS *starts to give cup to* COBB. *It falls from his hand, breaks; picks it up and places it on tray, then comes* C.)

KIMBALL. Now you're begining to play. That and another thousand. (2 *blues*)

COBB. How much is there? What a stingy little pot! Not worth taking.

(JULIUS *staggers, almost falsl, and starts to door.*)

BLAKE. Julius, come here, if you had this hand what would you do?

(JULIUS *looks at* BLAKE'S *hand and then* KIMBALL'S.)

JULIUS. I certainly would hesitate. (*Exits. At door he points to* KIMBALL'S *hand.* KIMBALL *catches him; quick exit*)

(*All laugh.*)

BLAKE. Kimball, what you got?

KIMBALL. All blue.

BLAKE. You win. Losers push. (*Pushing chips to* KIMBALL)

BETH. (*Off-stage*) Good-night, Mrs. Babbit.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Off-stage*) Good-night, dearie.

BLAKE. (*Notes the "good-night" smiles*) My cards. (*Sighs loudly*)

COBB. Royce, what are you hanging around here for? (*Puts in white chip*)

ROYCE. (*Putting in white chip*) I'm in on a pretty good thing.

COBB. So?

(*All put white chips in.*)

ROYCE. I've got some inside information.

WATTS. Look out: I had some inside information about some stock that was going to make me a Captain of Industry, and I am still selling neckties. (WATTS *cuts cards.* BLAKE *begins to deal*)

ROYCE. Well, any time Franklyn Royce is played for a sucker! Cobb just confirmed my tip; I'm going to milk that railroad dry. (BLAKE *gives him 2nd card twice around in deal*)

BLAKE. What do you mean?

ROYCE. There is a piece of property here to be

sold for taxes—(BLAKE *pauses in deal in front of* COBB, *holding cards till finish of speech*) and Willie is going to be on the job. The fact is I can't play much longer. I'm leaving to-night. Early bird, you know.

BLAKE. (*Significantly*) Something you're going to buy right away?

ROYCE. To-morrow morning. I've ordered my sleigh to meet me here later.

COBB. Well, you are a hustler!

(BLAKE *accidentally turns card face-up to* ROYCE.)

ROYCE. I won't take that card.

BLAKE. You'll have to take it.

ROYCE. I won't take it, it's no good, it's faced.

BLAKE. You can't refuse it; you've got to stick to the rules.

ROYCE. I won't.

BLAKE. Oh, well, we won't quarrel about it. I'll give you another card.

COBB. He can't have another card; he can look at his hand and if he wants to stay out he can, but he's got to play the cards he's got.

ROYCE. (*Leaning across table towards* COBB) I won't do either; you can't make me play this hand—it's a misdeal.

WATTS. Pick up your cards.

ROYCE. I won't!

COBB. You ass, why don't you look at the cards? That may be the very one you want. I'll look at them for you. (*Rises, putting cards to* C. *of table*) And stay out this hand.

ROYCE. You leave my cards alone, do you hear? (*Strikes at* COBB's *arm*)

BLAKE. (*Rises*) Here, it's a misdeal.

COBB. No, siree, Bob. The rule's as old as the game.

BLAKE. That will do, Cobb. (COBB *sits*) Your

cards, Kimball. (*Giving* KIMBALL *cards. Turning to get teapot*) Royce, have another drink.

COBB. I think he's had enough.

WATTS. He's just had enough to make him peevish.

(BLAKE *fills* ROYCE'S *cup, leaving tea-pot on big table, standing at his place.* KIMBALL *begins to shuffle.*)

BLAKE. Royce, expect to make a good thing out of that land?

ROYCE. Surest thing you know.

BLAKE. Good farming property?

ROYCE. No, regular stone pile; the railroad's got to have it; lays right alongside of the Junction.

BLAKE. Got to pay high for it?

ROYCE. Watch little Willie.

BLAKE. But suppose someone bids it in?

ROYCE. Ain't going to be anybody there to bid it in: nobody wants it.

COBB. How did you get on to it?

ROYCE. Regular Sherlock Holmes: tipped off railroad wanted it, see? Found out owner. That's where Franklyn old boy comes in.

(ROYCE *looks to his cup.*)

BLAKE. (*Taking tea-pot up from table*) Have another drink, Royce.

COBB. No, what are you trying to do?

(BLAKE *shakes head at* COBB.)

ROYCE. Say, what are you buttin' in for? I guess I know when I have had enough.

BLAKE. Cobb, this is my party, I know what I am doing.

ROYCE. Sure, fill her up again, Blake. (*Holding up cup, laughing*) Here is to little Franklyn!

COBB. (*After* ROYCE *has finished drink*) Come on, let's play the game!

(KIMBALL *begins to deal.*)

ROYCE. Play the game? You bet I played the game. Owner's a little country girl.

(BLAKE *sets tea-pot down forcibly, turning to watch* ROYCE. KIMBALL *stops dealing.*)

COBB. So there's a girl in the case?

ROYCE. Surest thing you know. Yaps around here wouldn't take advantage of a good thing—little Franklyn's long suit, taking advantage of any good thing. Nice little girl. (BLAKE *takes cigar*) Very fond of her, goin' to make it all right for her.

COBB. I should think she'd be sore to be done out of her land.

(BLAKE *lays down cigar.*)

ROYCE. Oh, that's all right—sell her land to the railroad—pot of money—come back and say you want a little of this coin—marry little Franklyn and then we live happy forevermore—(*Head sinks on chest*)

BLAKE. But suppose the little village maiden doesn't see it that way and tells you you're a thief?

ROYCE. Tells me I'm a thief. Blake, you're foolish—pour a lot of money in her lap—she isn't goin' to call me a thief. Blake, as a man of the world to a man of the world, you know that every woman's got her price. (*Sleigh bells heard off.* BLAKE *starts to hit him—then pours him another drink.* COBB *touches* BLAKE'S *arm*—ROYCE *takes cup, drinks. All watch* BLAKE) Thank you, Blake,

hooray for little Franklyn. (*Drinks*) Come on with your game. (*He shoves the cup across the table, his head drops forward on his arm. Sleigh bells sound off* R. BLAKE *rushes quickly to the window* R., *then comes down to* ROYCE—*shakes him* —ROYCE *does not move. The rest of this scene played very quickly*)

BLAKE. Out—down and out—Watts, after I'm gone. (*Going for coat and hat on sample table by door* C.)

WATTS. After you're gone? (*Rising*)

COBB. (*Turning up to* BLAKE—KIMBALL *rises*) Where are you going?

BLAKE. I'm going to the Junction in his sleigh.

KIMBALL. What?

BLAKE. Boys, aren't you on? It's her land he's going to steal.

KIMBALL. Whose?

BLAKE. Beth Elliott's. She's a dear plucky little girl, and I—I like her. (*Coming down* C.) I'm going to block his game, that's why I got him drunk. I'm going to beat it to that sale while he's sleeping this off. I'm going to save her land.

COBB. How?

BLAKE. I'm going to pay her taxes. She hasn't the money; it's up to me.

COBB. (*Pointing to* ROYCE) What'll we do with him?

BLAKE. That's up to you. Put a rose in your hair and go as far as you like. (*Exit quickly* C. *door*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE:—*The office of* FRANKLYN ROYCE.

TIME:—*Two o'clock of the following day.*

It is a square room, with yellow plaster walls and brown woodwork. At R. 1 E. *is a window with green shade, which is drawn down at the rise of the curtain. Above this window is a letter press. Above* R. 2 E. *is a fireplace. On the mantel stand letter and bill files. In the flat* L. *of* C. *is a door leading to the hall—with a backing representing plastered wall. Over the door is a transom which is practical; at* L. 1 E. *is a door. Against* L. *wall above this door is a bookcase. At* L. *of door in back flat is a hat-rack and* L. *of hatrack a small table. At* L. *of* C. *is a table with chairs* R. *and* L. *of it. At* R. *of* C. *a roll-top desk; on top of desk stand the letter files. In front of desk is a swivel arm-chair. At rear of stage and* R. *of* C. *is a leather couch. On the floor of stage is a large rug.*

Before the rise of the curtain can be heard a vigorous pounding on the door and rattling of the knob.

As curtain rises, JULIUS' *voice off: "Mr. Royce—Mr. Royce."*

(AT RISE. *Discovered:* ROYCE *asleep on the couch. The room is in semi-darkness, the blinds at the window are drawn; the daylight shows through the transom.* ROYCE *is in his shirt sleeves. His coat is thrown over him. His hair is dishevelled, his collar unfastened. There is a slight pause* —JULIUS' *head appears back of the transom.*

He lifts up the transom, pokes his head through and discovers ROYCE.)

JULIUS. Mr. Royce, Mr. Royce.

ROYCE. Who is it?

JULIUS. Julius.

ROYCE. Go away and leave me alone!

JULIUS. Lawd, man, you'd better rouse yourself up.

ROYCE. What in blazes do you mean, waking me up in the middle of the night?

JULIUS. Midle of de night? It am de middle of de day.

ROYCE. What!

JULIUS. Now you see—you see—yes, sir, de clock done struck two o'clock.

ROYCE. (*Jumps up, rises, goes down* R.) Two o'clock! Holy smoke, I've missed that sale—and Drury due here on the 2:15. What will I tell him?

JULIUS. Would you mind openin' the door?

ROYCE. Open it yourself.

JULIUS. Say, man, you think I'd climb up in this perilous position for fun. De door am locked.

ROYCE. Locked? (*Turns, looks up-stage*) Where is the key?

JULIUS. Mr. Watts done throw it over the transom last night.

ROYCE. What'd you lock me in for? (*Going up* C. *to door—finding key on floor*)

JULIUS. Don't go pickin' on me. Mr. Watts done it. (*Disappears*)

ROYCE. I like his nerve? (*Unlocks door and throws it open—crosses to table* L. *holding his head*)

(*Effect of ladder falling to the floor.*)

JULIUS. (*Enters—standing in door*) Lawd man, be careful! You done broke my leg in three pieces. (JULIUS *enters carrying pitcher*) He cer-

tainly do look bad. (*Offering pitcher*) Thought this might come in handy. (ROYCE *reaches for it*)

JULIUS. (*Turns* R.) Wait a minute, I'll get you a glass.

ROYCE. (*Crossing to* JULIUS) Never mind, this thirst isn't fussy. (*Grabs pitcher and drains it*)

JULIUS. (*Standing to* R. *of* ROYCE) I can hear that sizzlin' all de way down.

ROYCE. (*Handing* JULIUS *the pitcher—who puts it upon table up* L.—*crosses to table up* L.) Why didn't you call me? What do I pay you for?

JULIUS. (*Coming* C. *from table*) Mr. Watts done left positive instructions you wasn't to be roused before eleven o'clock.

ROYCE. (*Sitting* R. *of table* L.) That's queer! Why didn't you rouse me at eleven?

JULIUS. I done pound on de door at eleven o'clock, and then I done pound on de door at twelve —then I done pound on de door at one.

ROYCE. (*Interrupting*) Where was the cashier? (*Tying necktie*) She knew that I was supposed to be at the Junction this morning, and she knew that Drury was coming. Why didn't she call me? I'll see about this. (*Starts to rise*)

JULIUS. Say, man, hold your horses; she done pound with me—regular duet—and you scare her away. You gave most p'inted instructions where we was all to go to—and most terrifying illusions as to what would happen if we didn't go there, and after all, you is de boss. (*Crosses to desk, leaning on corner of it*)

ROYCE. You might have put me to bed properly while you were about it. (*Looking at couch*)

JULIUS. Lawd man, you desisted our efforts. That spot was your personal selection. (*Pointing to couch*)

ROYCE. Was I very much under the weather last night?

JULIUS. You was utterly submerged. Mr. Watts

and I done had our troubles pilotin' you here from the Elite.

ROYCE. Were the others all right?

JULIUS. They were slightly hilarious, but puffectly navigable. Of course, you held your own. But no ordinary drinker can hope to cope with drummers.

ROYCE. (*Slapping table*) Oh, shut up! (JULIUS *falls off desk*) Pull up that blind.

JULIUS. (*Going over to shade of window*) Yes, sah. (*Lets it go up with a slam*)

ROYCE. (*Holding head*) I didn't tell you to break it.

JULIUS. It ain't my fault; it's one of them quick action blinds.

ROYCE. (*Coming* C.) See if you can't get a quick move on and get this office fixed up. Drury will be here in a minute. (*Going back* L.)

JULIUS. Drury? Mr. Martin Drury? The Millionaire Drury of Indiamanopolis?

ROYCE. Don't stand gassing there. Get me a bracer.

JULIUS. (*Starting to* C.) Yes, sah. How'd you like a single portion o' the hair that Scotch dog what bit you last night?

ROYCE. Go out and get me a Bromo Seltzer.

JULIUS. Yes, sah. Oh, Lawdy, I mos' forgot—with Mr. Blake's compliments. (*Puts Bromo Seltzer on the table* L.)

ROYCE. What is it?

JULIUS. (*Coming little* C. *to* R.) Bromo Seltzer.

ROYCE. Tell Mr. Blake I'm much obliged. (*About to go out* L.)

JULIUS. Mr. Blake done left town.

ROYCE. (*Stopping*) What?

JULIUS. He done left town last night. Went over to the Junction in your sleigh.

ROYCE. To the Junction in my sleigh? Did he leave any word?

JULIUS. (*Moving right*) Left his trunks.

ROYCE. Did he give you any message for me?

JULIUS. (*Jumps*) No, sah. Oh, most forgot: Mr. Watts done give me de bottle. Mr. Watts said you take that to Mr. Royce with Mr. Blake's compliments. Mr. Watts certainly seemed powerful amused about somethin'. (*Laughs*)

ROYCE. Shut up! (*Hits table*) I don't see the joke. Fix me a dose. (*Starting to door* L.)

JULIUS. (*Going to end of desk*) Yes, sah. Don't you think you'd better brush up your hair a little bit before the millionaire arrives from Indianapolis?

ROYCE. Yes, I don't want Drury to see me like this. I suppose he'll raise merry hell as it is; but I can go over to-morrow.

JULIUS. Will you have a single or a double portion? (*Stepping out a little*)

ROYCE. Double, and be quick about it. (*Exits door* L.)

JULIUS. Double and be quick about it—(*Repeating. Taking up bottle with him*) I certainly feel sorry for that poor man. (*Going to the small table up* L. *Mixes Bromo Seltzer—puts in all the contents of the bottle*) I know just how he feels —cause I've been there myself many's the time. Oh, yes, indeedy.

(*A knock at the door.* JULIUS *opens it and discloses* BETH ELLIOTT *standing outside with a telegram in her hand.*)

BETH. I have a telegram for Mr. Royce.

(JULIUS *takes telegram and looks it over.*)

BETH. I said, for Mr. Royce.

JULIUS. I heard you, Miss Elliott, I heard you the first time; but you hadn't better bother him with

nothing trifling now. You just leave it, honey—and I'll give it to him when he's more ca'm-like. I'm soothin' him now. (*Referring to Bromo Seltzer*)

BETH. I can't leave it, Julius. It's a collect message. (BETH *starts toward desk* R. ROYCE'S *voice stops her*—JULIUS *gives back telegram. In doing so he screens her from view of door* L.)

(ROYCE *enters door* L.)

ROYCE. Julius, where's that drink? (JULIUS *rushes to the table.* ROYCE *sees* MISS ELLIOTT)

ROYCE. Oh, good-morning, Miss Elliott.

JULIUS. (*Up to door*) Morning! Lawd man—it's the middle of the afternoon. (ROYCE *glares at* JULIUS *and* JULIUS *exits slowly, stooping and going around the door*)

BETH. (*Crosses to* L., *meets* ROYCE C.) I have a telegram for you, Mr. Royce. Collect charges—the cashier said I must have your O. K. before she could pay them.

ROYCE. (*He signs the envelope*) She's quite a stickler for routine. (*As* BETH *offers the telegram, tries to take her hand*) Are you going to forgive me for what I said last night? I've no excuse, except that I was jealous.

BETH. Jealous? What has given you the right to be jealous?

ROYCE. Jealousy isn't a matter of right. You promised to walk home with me yesterday afternoon and you went with Blake. I'm ashamed to say, I tried to console myself, and I wasn't quite myself last night. Won't you understand and overlook it?

BETH. I suppose I must.

ROYCE. And we are friends again?

BETH. Friends? I can't rush into friendship, Mr. Royce. (*Turning from him, going little to* R.)

ROYCE. You wern't so reserved with Blake. (*Turning, tearing open envelope, moving to left and*

crushing envelope in hand) At least not to hear him tell it.

BETH. The envelope, please. (ROYCE *hands the envelope to her*) Thank you. (BETH *turns to go.* ROYCE *is reading the telegram*)

ROYCE. Damn! (*Crumpling the telegram fiercely in his hand.* BETH *turns, startled*) Miss Elliott—(*She turns*) this telegram concerns you.

BETH. Me? (*Up* C. *by door*)

ROYCE. Your land has been sold.

BETH. (*Stunned*) My land sold! My land sold?

ROYCE. Yes, bid in this morning at the tax sale.

BETH. (*Coming down to chair* R. *of table*) Who could have done this thing?

ROYCE. Blake.

BETH. Mr. Blake! I don't believe you. (ROYCE *hands her the telegram. Reading*) "Sorry you missed the sale."

ROYCE. You don't question this?

BETH. No, it's my own handwriting. I took it over the wire this morning? I thought the sale refered to merchandise. Why should he want my land?

ROYCE. Why? (*He points to the words on the telegram and reads*) "I'm going to milk that railroad dry"—That's why.

BETH. What does it mean?

ROYCE. That your land's worth a lot of money, and that Blake has it—(*Putting telegram on table*) that's what it means, damn him! (*Going* L.)

BETH. (*Sitting in chair* R. *of table*) A lot of money—my land—how?

ROYCE. (*Facing front*) The railroad wants to put in another spur of track at the Junction, and they have got to have your land to do it.

BETH. Why should Mr. Blake think the land the railroad wanted was mine? You see, there must be some mistake. He could know nothing—(*Pause*)

Why, yes, he did! I told him myself. (ROYCE *turns*) I described its exact location.

ROYCE. You told Blake? (*Up to table*) A man you never saw until yesterday? (*Going down* L.) Blake has a great way with women—(*She notes this*) but I didn't think he was as quick as all that. You, of all women! (*Up to table* L.) How did you happen to talk to him at all?

BETH. He made some inquiries at the window.

ROYCE. A scheme to get in conversation with you!

BETH. Oh, no, Mr. Royce, he had been carried beyond his destination, he had intended to get off at the Junction.

ROYCE. A fake, a fake pure and simple. (*Upstage*)

BETH. What I have told you is true. He was very amusing; we had lunch together. (*Turns.* ROYCE *makes movement*) I told him of the land and all it meant to me; but why should he send this wire to you? (*Turning round*)

ROYCE. (*Down to table back*) To rub it in. He knew that I was in love with you. (*She turns away*) Oh, every one has seen it but you. He knew that I had intended going over to bid it in. That's why he got me drunk—drugged me—had me locked in this room—so that he could sneak over to the Junction and do us both.

BETH. But you intended to bid it in! Why?

ROYCE. (*Disconcerted at first*) You hadn't the money to pay your taxes, you wouldn't accept it from me; I was going to resell it to the railroad for you through Mr. Drury, who was coming here today to close the deal.

BETH. Why didn't you tell me all this?

ROYCE. I wanted to surprise you. I thought gratitude might win you where other means had failed. Then last night, when I discovered that the

rumor was out, I decided to go at once before anyone here could get ahead of us.

BETH. Everybody here knows that a tax title is worthless—(ROYCE *starts—turning to him*) Why—for the moment I'd forgotten it myself.

ROYCE. Worthless! (*Steps back*)

BETH. Yes, I have six months in which to buy the land back.

ROYCE. You have? Then Blake wasn't so smart. (*Coming round to* L. *of table and to front*) There's a trick he's overlooked. We'll beat him yet. (*To table*) If you won't take the money from me, see Mr. Drury. I only want to help you to be rid of Blake at once and for all time.

BETH. (*After pause*) To be rid of him at once and for all time. (*There is a pause.* BETH *sits staring in front of her,* ROYCE *watching her narrowly*)

(MRS. BABBIT *rushes in.* ROYCE *goes to* L.)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Down to* BETH) Why, Beth, you poor dear, I've just heard the news; ain't it awful? Met Mrs. Dawson—she just got back from the Junction and says your land's been bought in. She talked so much I couldn't get a word out of her. Who did it?

ROYCE. Blake.

MRS. BABBIT. Blake—that drummer feller? And him so well spoken—such genteel manners—so plump and pleasing.

ROYCE. And so slick. (*Moving left and facing them*)

MRS. BABBIT. The minute I heard it I rushed right over to the depot. (*Moving toward* BETH) gimlet. Well—who ever would look for such deceit I knew you'd want me near you in such a crisis. I finally wormed where you were out of Crabb—(*Crosses to* C.) though I thought I'd have to use a in a fat man? (*Moving round back of* BETH) You

poor dear—come right to me! We'll go over to the hotel and have a cup of tea. Things have a way of looking brighter after a good cup of tea. (BETH *at the first word of womanly sympathy begins to break down*) Now, dearie—(BETH *begins to cry,* MRS. BABBIT *consoles her; looks at* ROYCE *over* BETH'S *bowed head, and motions for him to leave the room. She forms the words with her mouth, but does not articulate audibly* " Go away and let her have a good cry "—ROYCE *does not at first comprehend.* MRS. BABBIT *repeats it*—ROYCE *exits* C. *door*) There, there, dearie—don't you worry—there's some way out of this—I don't see it yet—(*Putting hand to her forehead*) but I'll get my brain to working presently! (*Moving* C.)

BETH. Oh, it isn't the land. I can buy it back.

MRS. BABBIT. Then what on earth are you crying about?

BETH. (*Turning to front*) The humiliation—the humiliation—when I think of last night!

MRS. BABBIT. (*Interrupting*) Last night?

BETH. When you were in the other room, letting him make love to me—believing his story of love at first sight—wanting to believe it—he seemed so honest—and all a trick to help him cheat me—how he must have laughed at me for a little simpleton—and those other men—I suppose they laughed with him—made a joke of me—as everyone else in this place will—when they hear the news—and will gossip and wonder at me—me! Oh, to be tricked and humiliated—and to care! How can I care? I haven't a scrap of pride left.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Moving toward her*) Care? You don't mean—you——

BETH. (*Interrupting*) Oh, yes, he swept me off my feet. (*Pause. Rising and going* L. *to end of table*) To think I might have loved him! Now I despise—I hate him!

MRS. BABBIT. (*Moving nearer*) That's right.

there ain't any man that stands in shoe leather that's worth a woman's tears.

BETH. (*Partly facing* MRS. BABBIT *and upstage*) I'll be even with him. I'll teach Mr. Blake there's one woman who can't be tricked, humiliated and laughed at. Oh, what must you think of me? (*Bowing head*)

MRS. BABBIT. I can't find it in my heart to blame you, dearie. He was an attractive devil. Old as I am and suspicious by nature—well, he certainly had a way with him. (*Turning to* BETH) What are you going to do?

BETH. Mr. Royce has asked me to see Mr. Drury.

MRS. BABBIT. Be careful—let this be a lesson to you—and him so fat and genial—men are deceivers ever—but what's a woman to do? You can't live with 'em or without 'em. (*Crosses* R. *to desk*)

(*Enter* ROYCE, *followed by* DRURY. ROYCE *to* L. C. DRURY C.)

ROYCE. Miss Elliott, let me present my employer, Mr. Drury.

(*Before* BETH *can acknowledge the introducton,* DRURY *advances cordially.* MRS. BABBIT *primps, fixing tie, etc.*)

DRURY. I'm glad to meet you, Miss Elliott. I'd like to have a talk with you a few minutes—alone. (*The last he says pointedly at* MRS. BABBIT *who, at first, pleased at the idea of meeting* DRURY, *is now furious*)

BETH. I have no secrets from Mrs. Babbit.

ROYCE. Mrs. Babbit, let me——

MRS. BABBIT. (*Interrupting*) Don't waste your breath, Mr. Royce. (*Crossing to door* C. *between*

DRURY *and* ROYCE. DRURY *crossing to* R. *of desk*) I don't have to have a house fall on me to take a hint. Good-bye, dearie.

(DRURY *is annoyed, but proceeds to make the best of it.*)

DRURY. I meant no offense, Madam. I did not intend to be rude.

MRS. BABBIT. No, it's just your way. You're one of those rough diamonds. Well, I'll have mine polished, thank you. (*Exits, slamming the door* C.)

DRURY. (*Coming toward* C.) Blake's been up to his old tricks again. I'm sorry you're the victim this time, Miss Elliott.

BETH. So Mr. Blake has done this before?

DRURY. He's always been a bit unscrupulous in his methods. He's a great chap with the women. you can't sell ladies' suits without the gift of gab; but, although anything's fair to-day in business, an offense of this kind can't go unpunished.

BETH. I've no desire to punish Mr. Blake. I don't care to have any further dealings with him —(*Going up* C.—ROYCE *drops down back of table*)

DRURY. You'll have to, Miss Elliott, if you want to recover that land. (*She stops*) You don't strike me as the sort of young woman to sacrifice your future through any sense of false pride.

BETH. But must I sink my pride to beg humbly for what he took from me?

ROYCE. (*Quickly*) You don't have to beg. You have only to demand. (*Coming down to chair* R. *of table*)

BETH. But I haven't the money to make such a demand. (*Looking at* ROYCE)

DRURY. That's where I come in. Royce tells me that you can buy back your land from Blake. I'll give you the money.

BETH. Oh, no, thank you, Mr. Drury, you see I have six months—(*Starts to door* C.)

DRURY. (*Interrupting*) One moment, you can't afford to wait six months. We must stop this here and now. We must get to that railroad before Blake has time to make another move.

BETH. But the land is mine.

DRURY. If Blake sells to the railroad they'll rush in improvements and you would have to pay them for the land *and* the improvements.

ROYCE. Would she be obliged to do that?

DRURY. That is the law. (*Crossing to* L.)

BETH. Oh, this leaves me helpless.

DRURY. Not at all. You couldn't fight a corporation. (*Moving down* R.) But I can. How much will you owe Blake?

BETH. About four hundred dollars.

DRURY. (*Going to chair at desk*) Here, I'll give you the check to pay off Blake, and I'll buy your land. (*Pause—turning in chair*) Let me see —does five thousand dollars strike you as a fair price? (*Then turns back and writes check*)

BETH. (*Delighted*) Five thousand dollars!

ROYCE. Why, it's a fortune. This is very generous of you, Mr. Drury.

BETH. It's too generous. I can't be under such obligations. (*Coming nearer desk*)

DRURY. No obligations. It's business. I'll resell to the railroad, possibly at a small profit. (*Rising*) But even if I lose by the contract, I am ready and willing to do this for you. I couldn't have it said that an employee of Martin Drury's would cheat a woman. It would reflect on the firm.

ROYCE. (*Eagerly*) You'll accept this offer?

BETH. (*After a pause*) I don't know what to do. (*Moving to* C.)

DRURY. Oh, you're not going to let Blake cheat you.

ROYCE. And laugh at you.

DRURY. Why not laugh at him? He's a smart boy, but you're a clever woman. (*Taking her by her* L. *arm, leading her to his desk*) Why not beat him at his own game? Punish him in his pocket-book; that's the worst punishment you can inflict on any man. Come, here is the check for four hundred dollars for Blake; you'll have to endorse it over to him.

(BETH *goes to desk, sits, takes the pen from* DRURY, *and is about to endorse it; then hesitates.*)

BETH. (*Turning to* DRURY) I'm so bewildered —I'm so alone—I've no experience of business or men. It's my ignorance against your knowledge. I know you have little to gain, but everything I have is at stake. Forgive my doubt, Mr. Drury, but why do you wish to do this for me?

(DRURY *is confused,* ROYCE *anxious. They are watching* BETH, *when the door opens and* BLAKE *appears.*)

BLAKE. Hello, Franklin, old top!

ROYCE. Blake! (*By table* L.)

(BETH *starts to rise, but* DRURY *lays a restraining hand on her shoulder and advances so that he screens her from* BLAKE.)

BLAKE. Well, I beat you to it? Get my wire? Sorry I had to send it collect, but those taxes and my long-distance chat with the president of the railroad took all my loose change. Sorry I was late, Mr. Drury. (*Taking off gloves, coat, and hanging coat on rack*)

DRURY. So you bought Miss Elliott's land today? (*At end of desk*)

BLAKE. Aren't peeved, are you? (*In* C. *near door*)

DRURY. I'm disgusted at your dishonorable dealings.

BLAKE. You're there strong with Bible-class talk, but it doesn't listen well coming from you, and this isn't your scrap, Mr. Drury. (*Looking at* ROYCE)

DRURY. I'm going to make it my scrap.

BLAKE. Just hungry for trouble! But you can't get any rise out of me. I'm wearing that original smile that won't wipe off. (*Smiles*) For I've just turned a neat little trick in real estate. (BETH *turns to desk*) Had some inside information. (*Putting hat on rack.* BETH *endorses check*) Kind of tough on my old pal, Frank.

DRURY. (*Going down* L.) You see, Miss Elliott. (*Goes around* BETH *to* R.)

(BLAKE, *who has been putting his hat on rack, stops an instant and pauses.*)

BLAKE. Miss Elliott! (*He looks at* DRURY *and* ROYCE, *then comes easily towards* BETH, *offering to shake hands*) This is a surprise! I've been wearing out my congress gaiters looking for you.

(DRURY *gets check.*)

BETH. I'm glad you've found me, Mr. Blake. (*Crossing to* L. *in front of table*) It saves me the trouble of looking for you.

BLAKE. Why, what's little Bobbie done now? (*Following* BETH *to* L. DRURY *moves up to desk*) Won't you come across with a few kind words that will elucidate this greeting frappé? (*She looks at him, then silently hands him the tel-*

gram. BLAKE *reads it. Slight pause*) Don't let this keep you awake nights. Come out on the back porch and I'll explain. (*Moving towards her, he goes to take her arm.* BETH *resents it*)

BETH. Explain? You're found out, and you think to escape the consequences by making a joke of it all. Explain? You bought my land to-day, didn't you?

BLAKE. (*Pause*) I was at the sale. (*Crossing to* C.)

BETH. I want my land!

BLAKE. Why? (*He puts his hand in his pocket, from which he half draws a paper, then stops*)

DRURY. (*Interrupting*) Why? Because I've made her an offer and she has accepted it. (ROYCE *and* DRURY *watch* BETH *eagerly. Slight pause*)

BETH. Yes, I've accepted it.

(DRURY *takes check from desk, looking at endorsement.* BLAKE *puts the paper back in his pocket and slaps his pocket significantly.*)

BLAKE. Now, wait a minute: this thing's got me going! You don't mean to say that you've sold your land to them?

BETH. Yes.

(ROYCE *and* DRURY *smile with relief.*)

BLAKE. You can't do that. Don't you see they're a couple of sharks, conning you with a few hundreds?

BETH. Hundreds? How little you know, then. They've given me thousands! You, after what you've done, dare to stand there defaming them?

BLAKE. Defaming them? This pair of second story workers? You're in the wrong. They've never been in business for their health. Anything

they may have handed you, no matter what it looks like, is a lemon.

BETH. How dare you trick and cheat me, and then laugh?

BLAKE. Laugh? Me? I'm an endless chain of misery. You'll be sorry you've spoken to me like this; you have it framed up all wrong.

BETH. Mr. Royce has disclosed your treachery to me.

BLAKE. He's a healthy one to talk about treachery! He's handed out a lot of information. Did he happen to tip it off that he intended to go over and buy in your property?

BETH. Yes—to protect me from you. (*She goes up-stage*)

BLAKE. Royce, you're immense. (*Bowing mockingly to* ROYCE) But you don't believe him? (*Going up* C. *to* BETH)

BETH. And did you think I'd believe you? Believe the word of a man that I never saw until yesterday, against the word of this man who has proven himself my friend?

BLAKE. Your friend? Somebody's been stringing you. He's trying to cheat you and has called in our friend on my right to help him. (*Looking at* DRURY)

DRURY. (*Moving over to* BLAKE) Be careful, Blake, I don't like these references to me and I may not overlook them.

BETH. It's too bad about you, but you never did have a sincere regard for the truth! (*Looking toward* ROYCE)

DRURY. (*Moving nearer to* BLAKE) The truth? You!

BLAKE. (*Turning on* DRURY—*interrupting*) Don't say it—your age protects you—but don't get reckless.

DRURY. (*Looking at check in his hand*) Come now, Blake, I'm old, but I'm not—foolish. You

thought you had a good thing! I like you, but I'm disappointed in you. (*Moving down* R.) Do the right thing by this girl.

BLAKE. Just keep cases on little Bobbie. He's going to do the right thing by this girl; you pikers won't steal her land and get away with it—not with me on the job!

ROYCE. (*Coming to front of table*) If you thought I wanted to rob her, why didn't you go to her last night? She was just across the hall with Mrs. Babbit.

BETH. (*Coming down a step*) Why didn't you come to me?

BLAKE. There was no time to lose. (*Moving nearer* BETH) I did what seemed best for you.

BETH. (*She moves away from him to front of table* L.) Lies—lies—all lies! (*Turning to* BLAKE) You did what seemed best for me. You thought only of cheating me; you knew my land was of value. Oh, yes, you knew the railroad's plans made it of value. You had inside information. You turned a neat little trick in real estate; you schemed to outwit me, to steal my land, to sell it to the railroad——

BLAKE. (*Interrupting*) No—no—that is not true. I did it solely for you. (*Coming to table* L.)

BETH. Then if you did this all solely for me, why don't you give me my land?

BLAKE. Give you your land—to sell it for a song to them? No, I'll save you in spite of yourself.

BETH. You'll save me? (*Moving across* R. *to* DRURY) I'll save myself. Mr. Drury, the check, please. (DRURY *gives her the check. She crosses to the table, placing check on it*) There—I buy it back. (*Starting to go up-stage*) If the price were more I'd pay it to you.

BLAKE. No, I refuse to sell it to you. I refuse to let you ruin yourself.

BETH. You must take this check. (*Turning*)

BLAKE. No!

BETH. You will have to take this check. You were very clever, Mr. Blake, but you weren't clever enough: you forget that the law protects women from cheats like you; you didn't know that I could refund you the money you paid for my land, that I had six months in which to reclaim it. That you overlooked, didn't you?

BLAKE. Miss Elliott! Beth!

BETH. (*She goes up to the door*) You thought me a silly little country girl, flattered by the shop-worn attentions of a drummer; you thought to cheat a woman—insult her with your love, while you robbed her, win her heart, perhaps—and then pass on and laugh. But it's the silly little country girl who laughs and laughs and laughs! (*She bursts into a hysterical fit of laughter and exits in a furious rage, her laughter dying away in the distance*)

BLAKE. (*Against table—back of it—turning to audience*) Well, I've a hoodoo that's twins.

DRURY. Blake, I'm sorry for you. (*Going to chair at desk.* BLAKE *looks at* DRURY)

BLAKE. Then if you're sorry for me, take your money out of this deal. Let Royce and I fight it out alone. If he has spunk enough to fight fair—(*Looking hard at* ROYCE)

ROYCE. (*Interrupting*) You're a fine one to talk about fighting fair! You forget, you got me drunk. (*Coming a little to* R.)

BLAKE. I fight a crook with a crook's weapons.

DRURY. We've got you, Blake—(*Sitting*)

BLAKE. (*Over to desk*) Give me a chance, Drury. I've always worked for your best interests. I've never asked a favor—I do so now. I don't give a hoot about myself—but—she's the whole thing to me. I'm begging for the girl I love. Give her a square deal.

DRURY. I've given her a square deal; I'm giving her more than she can get out of the railroad.

BLAKE. What are you giving her? (*Leaning on desk*)

DRURY. Five thousand dollars.

BLAKE. Five thousand dollars! Aren't you afraid you'll sprain your bank account? Why, you know that right of way's worth anything she asks for it. I won't believe that this is your scheme—Royce has doped this trick out for you.

DRURY. There's no trick about it, I've made her an offer and she's accepted it. That's business.

BLAKE. Business isn't stealing candy from infants.

DRURY. Business is business.

BLAKE. Then you won't back *out* of this deal?

DRURY. Did you ever know me to *back* out?

BLAKE. Then we go to the mat.

DRURY. (*Laughingly*) No, the fight's over.

BLAKE. You think you've got that girl hipped, but you haven't; you've only got her dazzled by a few thousand that aren't a flea bite to what she's going to get.

DRURY. Oh, is she?

BLAKE. *You bet she is!* You'll take your money out of this deal or I'll show you up as you are. (DRURY *smiles*) I know a few things about your business methods that wouldn't look dressy in print. (DRURY *shows that he's alarmed*) You keep your hands off that land of Beth Elliott's, for if this is to be a scrap, you'll take the count. (*Turning back to* DRURY)

DRURY. After all, why should she come between old friends? (BLAKE *turns away*) Maybe we can boost that offer a couple of thousand. We haven't closed with Miss Elliott yet.

BLAKE. You haven't closed with her yet?

DRURY. No, we haven't given her that check for $5,000.

BLAKE. You haven't? Oh, this is a pipe! (*Going up* C.)

ROYCE. (*Turning quickly—smashing fist on table*) This deal is closed.

BLAKE. Closed. Oh, make a noise like a hoop and roll away! You haven't gotten to her with your money yet. (*Coming down* C.)

ROYCE. What's that's to you? This check put you out of it.

BLAKE. (*Slowly and quietly*) You can't rush me. I'm going to take my time; all I need is time to find Beth Elliott—(ROYCE *and* DRURY *laugh. To* ROYCE) Oh, you can laugh, but I'm going to hand you the longest, largest laugh of your existence. But I'll be doing the smiling. (*To* DRURY) You had me whipped for a minute or two, but I've got my second wind. I'm going to Beth Elliott, for now I can tell her the truth. The land's never been mine. She's always owned it. She owns it now. I only paid the taxes.

ROYCE. Why didn't you tell her here?

BLAKE. Because I thought you had her cinched —that she had sold it to you and taken the coin. But you've given the snap away. Oh, this is like getting money from home! (*Turning up* C.)

DRURY. Don't be foolish, Blake. I'll make it worth your while. I'll give you a bit of it.

ROYCE. No, I'm damned if you do!

DRURY. You'll do what I say. Come, Blake, can't we compromise?

BLAKE. (*Coming to desk*) No. Compromise with you and rob her! Do you think you can buy me to do up the woman I love? I'm not one of your tools that you can get to do your dirty work—*line* their pockets while they fill yours! You've made me sell a few goods that weren't all wool and a yard wide, but you can't make me a common thief! Compromise, you damned old bandit? To hell with your compromise!

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

SCENE:—*Same as* ACT II. *One hour later. Rise of curtain discloses* BLAKE'S *room with the sample tables stripped of their contents.*

DISCOVERED: BLAKE *closing and locking a sample trunk.*

JULIUS *enters, wheeling a small porter's truck.* BLAKE *helps him put trunk on the truck. Gives him a tip.*

BLAKE. Now, you understand, you take all these sample trunks to the Widow Stratton's store; tell the cashier that Mr. Royce will take charge of them. (*Giving coin*)

JULIUS. (*Wheeling around towards door*) How about yo' personal baggage?

(BLAKE *crossing to* R. *table.*)

BLAKE. (*By table*) Let you know about that later. (*He looks at his watch nervously, then crosses to window, front of table*)

(JULIUS *is wheeling out the truck.*)

BLAKE. Julius.

JULIUS. Yes, sah?

BLAKE. Bring me a bottle of beer and a sandwich.

JULIUS. Yes, sah. (*Putting down trunk*) What sorta sandwich you prefer? (JULIUS *is* C.)

BLAKE. Any old thing.

JULIUS. Yes, sah, that's what we make sand-

wiches outa. What's yo' preference as to the fillin'?

BLAKE. (*Looking out window* R.) Wonder where Watts is?

JULIUS. How'd you like a nice cannibal? You know, raw meat chopped up fine?

BLAKE. No—no——

JULIUS. Lemme suggest a Sapho.

BLAKE. (*Coming to* R. C. *of table*) A what?

JULIUS. Mighty temptin' is a Sapho. Its consistency is a young aig, fried, mos' tenderly reposin' on a juicy slice a onion of Spanish birth. Very hot stuff is a Sapho.

BLAKE. (*Furiously*) Say, you get me a sandwich.

JULIUS. (*Starts*) Yes, sir. (*Exits with trunk*)

(BLAKE *goes over to window, then turns toward window.* JULIUS *is at door.* WATTS *enters. They each try to get out of the other's way.*)

WATTS. What's the idea? (*Coming down* L.)

BLAKE. (*Coming over to Watts*) Did you find her?

WATTS. No.

BLAKE. (R.) I might have known you'd fall down. (*He walks away disgustedly up-stage*)

WATTS. (L.) I like that! Me burning up the boardwalk to oblige you! Lots of thanks I get.

BLAKE. (R. *turning to him*) Where did you go? (*Coming down*)

WATTS. Depot—boarding-house—depot——

BLAKE. (*Going up-stage*) I told you I'd been there. (*Towards* WATTS *and then up* C.)

WATTS. Well, I thought she might have doubled on the trail. Nothing doing.

BLAKE. Where can she be? (*Coming down-stage to him*) Where have you been all this time?

WATTS. Standin' round street corners rubberin'

at every woman in sight. Within an ace of being shoved in the lockup by the village constable for flirtin'. Even went over to the store, thinking, she might have gone there again. Not on the premises.

BLAKE. Were Royce and Drury there?

WATTS. No.

BLAKE. How did you get the information?

WATTS. Made love to that vinegary old dame, Royce's cashier.

BLAKE. Is that the way you fool around? Is that all you think about? Even in a time like this, isn't any skirt immune? (*Crosses to front of table* R.)

WATTS. You bet *she* is! (BLAKE *turns*) Only did it to further your interests. You forget that I took my life in my hands. (BLAKE *moves away to* R.) She was a tight-wad as far as news was concerned, but after a few broad-guage compliments she loosened up.

BLAKE. Suppose they may have found her? (*Crossing to* R. *front of table*)

WATTS. Do you think Miss Elliott was at the boarding-house when you called?

BLAKE. (*Turning to Watts*) Crabb thought she had gone there, but it wasn't her day at home —at least she wasn't receiving Bob Blake. Suppose she's sitting there having a talk with them now.

WATTS. What difference would that make? You said she had accepted their offer.

BLAKE. Yes, but when I left home to locate her, she hadn't committed herself for keeps. (*Pause*) She hadn't received the check for the five thousand.

WATTS. (*Slowly*) Oh, I see. (WATTS *looks at* BLAKE)

BLAKE. Drury let that cat out of the bag. (*Front of table*) If she could only be found, only persuaded to hang on—now that I've saved her

property. When I made that bluff I didn't suppose for a moment that anyone could disappear off the face of the earth in a jerkwater town of this size.

WATTS. It looks as though they had you beat. (*Sympathetically*)

BLAKE. (*At table, turning*) Not on your life! I've still a chance if I can find her, and I'd give a year's salary to do it.

WATTS. That's good—when you haven't a job in sight.

BLAKE. That doesn't worry me; I haven't thought about it. (*Pause*) I can't think of anything but her.

WATTS. Well, you're certainly there with the love-at-first-sight gag, strong.

BLAKE. Love at first sight? Watts, I was hit by a cyclone.

WATTS. If this is the best it does for you, and I see it coming my way, me for the cellar!

BLAKE. (*Moving over to window*) Talk's cheap. Where can she be?

WATTS. (*Coming across to table* R.) If any woman told me I wasn't on the level it would detain me for a moment. (*Sits chair back of table*)

BLAKE. (*Over at window*) She did put the knife in and turn it around. (*Turning from window*)

WATTS. She jumped to conclusions mighty quickly.

BLAKE. (*Comes to chair* R. *of table*) You can't blame her. When you frame it up in cold blood, their arguments did seem reasonable. She didn't know me; I was only a chance acquaintance.

WATTS. It seemed to me last night from the point of an unprejudiced observer, that for a chance acquaintance you were going some.

BLAKE. You should have heard her to-day; talk about reading the riot act! But I wouldn't care a continental about that if I could only find her—

(*Moves across stage and crosses to chair* L.)—see her—save her! To think she's going to lose by a brace game—it's fierce.

WATTS. (*Is seated*) Well, you've done all you can; no use letting this get on your digestion. Come on, Blake, there are others.

BLAKE. (C.) Oh, don't Wattsie, don't. (*Turning to* WATTS)

WATTS. I only meant to cheer you up. I hate to see you like this.

BLAKE. (*Toward chair* L. *of table*) You don't think I'm stuck on feeling like this? I'm having a devil of a lovely time! (*Sitting* L. *of table*)

WATTS. Last night you were at concert pitch.

BLAKE. This minute I'm down somewhere below the G string. (*Pause*) Oh, blow the happy holiday season! A man gets feeling so blue and lonely, he's liable to catch anything, with the pores of his heart all open.

WATTS. And you don't deserve it, Bob; you've always been on the square with women.

BLAKE. Maybe I haven't. Maybe I'm getting paid for something I've done somewhere, somehow. Gee, but it's an awful price; it's so hopeless—I can't see daylight ahead—all I can see is her, looking at me with hate in her eyes. Wattsie, several times in my life I've seemed to hit the jumping off place. Once when I was broke with others depending on me, and me the only thing between them and misery—I stood on the brink and looked over. Then, when my mother died—I thought I'd gone the limit. But this—this being in love—is Simonpure hell.

WATTS. (*After pause*) I know, old man, I know.

BLAKE. (*Looks at* WATTS—*pointedly*) What do you think of me sitting here drooling like a lovesick idiot, while those thieves may be sitting in the

boarding-house robbing her? (BLAKE *goes for hat and coat on table by* C. *door*)

WATTS. (*Rising, putting chair up and moving to* R.) Where are you going? What are you going to do?

BLAKE. (*Stopping*) I'm going back to that boarding-house and I'm going to see Beth Elliott, if I have to break in the door to do it.

WATTS. Keep your clothes on. You can't do that. It would be a lovely finish to this mess—you pinched for house-breaking.

(JULIUS *knocks and enters with tray.*)

JULIUS. Heah yo' refreshment, sah.

BLAKE. (*Up* C.) Take it away—I don't want it. I haven't time—(*Moving down* L. *a little*)

WATTS. Hold on, now; eat something before you go.

BLAKE. No, no, I couldn't.

WATTS. Oh, be sensible.

(JULIUS *brings tray, etc., to table* R., *standing above chair* L. *of table.*)

BLAKE. Eat? The way I feel? (*Coming downstage to* L. C.)

WATTS. An empty heart will fit a lot more comfortably over a full stomach. Julius, do this again for me. (*Coming down* R. C.)

JULIUS. (*Over his shoulder*) Yes, sah—(*Pause*) Bring it right up soon as I serve some moh tea to Mrs. Babbit an' her lady fren'.

BLAKE. What lady friend?

JULIUS. Miss Elliott:

(BLAKE *and* WATTS *start.*)

BLAKE. Is she here?

JULIUS. Yes, sah—(*Pause*)—right across the hall with Mrs. Babbit.

BLAKE. (*Starting for* WATTS) Why in H——? Why didn't you think that she might be with Mrs. Babbit?

WATTS. Look here, I'm not the goat! Why didn't you?

BLAKE. (*Moving to* L.) My brain hasn't been working overtime the last twenty-four hours.

WATTS. No, your heart's kept you busy.

BLAKE. (*Starting for door* C.) I'm going in there!

WATTS. Back up, Blake, you've got it all your own way. (BLAKE *turns*) Now, let's see how the land lays. (*To* JULIUS) How long's Miss Elliott been with Mrs. Babbit?

JULIUS. (*At table, pouring beer into glass*) About an hour.

BLAKE. (*Coming down* L. C.) Then she came straight here!

WATTS. Have you seen Miss Elliott?

JULIUS. Yes, sah.

BLAKE. How does she seem?

JULIUS. Seems mighty po'rly. (*Pause*) 'Pears to me they's havin' troublous times 'cross the hall. (*Coming to* L. *side of table, in front of chair*)

BLAKE. What do you mean? How do you know?

JULIUS. I knows I'se served one portion a tea an' now they's ordered moh.

WATTS. What's that got to do with it?

JULIUS. Guess you ain't acquainted with the ways of females?

WATTS. (*Smiling*) No, we're in the amateur class.

BLAKE. Cut out that comedy. Go on, Julius.

JULIUS. (*Turns to* BLAKE) One order a tea's usually enough for a woman's ordinary cryin' spell, but when they jes' naturally wallows in it, you want to look out for hysterics.

WATTS. Is Mrs. Babbit crying?

JULIUS. Mrs. Babbit cryin'? I'd certainly like to get a glimpse of the person who could make that woman cry! She's fightin' mad, she jest sits there a rockin' herself to death an' ejaculatin' "I told you so—I warnt you against these drummers—" (BLAKE *and* WATTS *annoyed. Turns to* BLAKE) Miss Elliott jes' moan an' wail, like to cry her haid plumb off. Mrs. Babbit say Miss Elliott sufferin' from a misery in the haid. Looks to Julius like it was a misery in de heart! (JULIU *exits*)

WATTS. Poor kid! (BLAKE *starts to follow* JULIUS *to* C. *door*) Are you clean batty?

BLAKE. I tell you I'm going in there.

WATTS. Do you want to crab everything?

BLAKE. How?

WATTS. Don't be a chump. You can't force your way into that room. You haven't any warrant to serve. You're no sheriff; Miss Elliott has refused to have anything to do with you; you wouldn't have any better luck with Mrs. Babbit; she's heard Beth's story; she wouldn't even allow you to come in, let alone listen to you.

BLAKE. (*Comng down toward* WATTS) If that's the best you can do in the way of advice—on your way. She'll have to listen to me. (*Going up* C. *a little*) I've a card up my sleeve. (*Starting up to door*)

WATTS. (R. C.) Don't play it too soon. Let *me* go and persuade her to see you.

BLAKE. (*Coming toward him*) No, do you think I've lost my nerve? I know what I'm doing. (*Pause*) I may not know *all* about women, but that crying spell looks to me as though a thaw had set in and the ice was moving. (*Moving* L.)

WATTS. (*After laugh*) For Heaven's sake, sit tight—(*Going little to* L. *by chair* L. *of table*) just a moment, and let *me* go. (*He goes down to table*) I'm not exactly pining for the job. Blessed are the

peacemakers—but for you, Bob, I'm willing to get mine.

(BLAKE *stops* WATTS *who has started up-stage.* JULIUS *enters.*)

JULIUS. (*Coming to* C.) Excuse me, Mistah Blake, but I wants to ask you about them trunks.

BLAKE. What about them?

JULIUS. Mr. Royce says he don't want them over to the store; he wants 'em sent to the depot. Whose orders is I am to obey?

BLAKE. Royce? Where is he? (*Turning toward* JULIUS)

JULIUS. He's downstairs.

BLAKE *and* WATTS. Downstairs? WATTS *sits chair* L. *of table*)

JULIUS. (C.) Yes, sah, with that millionaire gentleman from Indiamanopolis.

BLAKE. How long have they been here?

JULIUS. Just come. I'm takin' their cards up to Miss Elliott. (*He shows cards on tray in right hand*)

BLAKE. What luck! (*He takes them off the tray, goes into his pocket*) Julius, there's a ten-dollar note for you if you'll forget to deliver those cards.

JULIUS. What?

BLAKE. You give me those cards; you take this ten-dollar bill and chase yourself!

JULIUS. (*Starts to door* C., *then turns*) Where am I to go to?

BLAKE. Oh, I don't care. (*After laugh*) Go up in the attic and play dead.

JULIUS. (*Turning from* BLAKE *to go up*) But they may suspect collision between us.

BLAKE. How?

JULIUS. They asked me if you was here?

BLAKE. What did you say?

JULIUS. I say yes, sah.

(WATTS *shakes head.*)

BLAKE. That's bad. (*Pause*) Oh, Watts, you go downstairs——

WATTS. (*Rising*) What'll I do?

BLAKE. Fall over them accidentally, tell them I've gone out, button-hole 'em. I don't care what you do, but keep them there.

WATTS. Don't you worry; it's great I'm in training! Come on, you. (*He makes a few passes at* JULIUS, *who ducks.* WATTS *rushes out,* BLAKE *pushing* JULIUS *out after him*)

BLAKE. The attic for yours! (JULIUS *exits.* BLAKE *pulls himself together*)

BLAKE. It's up to you, Bob, now, for a little quick stuff. (BLAKE *goes across the hall and he knocks at the door. Pause. He knocks again violently.* MRS. BABBIT *comes to the door.* BLAKE *grasps her wrist and pulls her across the hall into his room well down-stage*)

MRS. BABBIT. Are you trying to kidnap me?

BLAKE. (*Closes the door*) I want to see you.

MRS. BABBIT. Looks like you wanted to kill me. Open that door.

BLAKE. I've got to talk to you. (*Coming to her*) and talk hard. (*She looks at him*) Oh, not about myself: about her—Beth!

MRS. BABBIT. You dare to take her name in vain after what you've done to my poor lamb? Traitor! (*Going down* R. *front of table*)

BLAKE. (*Interrupting*) Go slow.

MRS. BABBIT. Don't hector me, young fellow! Let me outa this. (*Moving little towards* BLAKE)

BLAKE. You've got to hear me: you'd do anything for Beth, wouldn't you?

MRS. BABBIT. Yes, but my God, I draw the line at bein' compromised! Open that door.

BLAKE. Don't worry, you're old enough to be my mother! (*Coming down* L.)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Going over to* BLAKE) How dare you insult my gray hairs?

BLAKE. Keep your shirt—!

MRS. BABBIT. (*Looks shocked—starts for him*) Sir!

BLAKE. (*Coming over to table* L.) Your shirt-waist on.

MRS. BABBIT. You're endangering my good name! The least you can do is respect my apparel. (*Going* R. *in front of table*)

BLAKE. (*Coming* C.) We mustn't quarrel.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Turning on him*) Who began it? Do you suppose for one moment any man kin drag me in by the hair a my head willy-nilly and expect me to smile and look pleasant!

BLAKE. My work may be a little rough but I mean well. Listen to me—(*Phone rings*)

MRS. BABBIT. I've heard all I want to.

BLAKE. But not all you're going to. (*Going to phone*) Hello! What? yes, Watts—(*Pause*) No, it isn't settled yet. (*Pause*) You can't hold them much longer. (*Pause*) Royce seems suspicious. (*Pause*) He's talking to the hotel clerk. Don't let him get by with anything. Keep on the job—(*At phone*) You see Royce and Drury are getting restless. I'm desperate. (*Coming over quickly to* MRS. BABBIT)

MRS. BABBIT. Gracious powers and I'm alone! (*She falls back against table*)

BLAKE. I don't want to frighten you, but I must see Beth Elliott before they do.

MRS. BABBIT. And you think to use me as a go-between! (*Going up to him*) Young man, you've picked the wrong party: I'll have nothing to do with you. I've heard Beth's story and I believe it. (*Turning away*)

BLAKE. You mean you've heard Royce's yarn? Well, it's a lie from beginning to end. Now you're going to hear the truth.

MRS. BABBIT. The truth? You expect me to believe you, a drummer? (*Moving* R.)

BLAKE. There you go with that drummer thing again! We may sandbag people into buying goods, but we're not gold brick boys. I didn't expect that line of talk from you; I thought a woman of the world like you—would want to hear both sides of the case, not let yourself be hurried into a snap judgment.

MRS. BABBIT. Well? (*Sitting down chair* L. *of table* R.) What you gotta say for yourself?

BLAKE. Put anything you may think of me out of your mind. Leave it free to consider without prejudice several points in the deal I know you've overlooked; for a woman with your brains wouldn't take stock in the first story she heard; your judgments have been switched by your love for Beth. You say you believe her story. (*She turns*) You must admit she's telling you—(*She turns on him*) oh, in all good faith—Royce's side of the case. Have you always thought Royce was on the level?

MRS. BABBIT. (*Pausing*) Well, no, I haven't.

BLAKE. Do you think Royce the kind of man likely to do anything for nothing?

MRS. BABBIT. You bet he isn't. Why, he's stole the Widow Stratton blind.

BLAKE. Exactly, that's what he's trying to do with Beth. If he's giving her $5,000 for her land, don't you know that it's worth more than that to him?

MRS. BABBIT. (*Pause*) I never thought o' that.

BLAKE. Stop and think a minute. (*Pause*) How would I, a stranger to Grand Crossing, who heard for the first time yesterday about Miss Elliott's property, have known what to do and how to get it, if someone hadn't given the snap away?

MRS. BABBIT. (*Turning*) You mean?

BLAKE. I mean that Royce sat in our poker game last night and began hitting it up until he got to the

stage where a drunken man sees big and talks large. He bragged about his inside information that Cobb had verified, and blew to us his little scheme to rob Beth.

MRS. BABBIT. I wish't I'd been there; I'd a massacreed him.

BLAKE. I did better than that. (*Moving* L.) I got him drunk, jumped into his sleigh——

MRS. BABBIT. (*Interrupting*) His sleigh?

BLAKE. (*Gets deed from pocket*) Why, yes—he had it waiting outside, and I hiked to the sale.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Pause*) Ah, but you did what he was trying to do.

BLAKE. I didn't buy her land—(*Moving over to her. Pause*) I only paid her taxes. (*He shows her the receipt*) There is the receipt.

MRS. BABBIT. (*Pause—after looking at receipt*) Good heavens, man, why didn't you tell her?

BLAKE. I didn't have the chance—I didn't dare. Don't you understand when I dropped to the fact that she had accepted their offer I couldn't tell her before them that I had only paid her taxes. If they had known she owned the land, they would have given her the check for $5,000 then and there, and the deal would have been closed.

MRS. BABBIT. I see it all now.

BLAKE. I was running a bluff—couldn't tip my hand—I didn't figure that she wouldn't believe that I was fair and square.

MRS. BABBIT. I might a knowned there was a nigger in the wood-pile! (*Rising*) What's to be done now? (*Facing him*)

BLAKE. There's still a chance. She hasn't that check and she must be prevented from taking it. You'll help me?

MRS. BABBIT. Help you, young man, my blood's boilin'! What do you want me to do? (*Comes over to him*)

BLAKE. Go to her, give her this receipt and tell her to hang on like grim death.

MRS. BABBIT. Why don't you give it to her yourself. (*Giving* BLAKE *deed*)

BLAKE. She'll listen to you; she might put up an argument with me. Royce and Drury will be delivering those cards in person if we don't hurry. We mustn't waste time making gallery plays. Now, hustle! (JULIUS *knocks on door.* BLAKE *takes* MRS. BABBIT *to door* C.)

MRS. BABBIT. Heavens—my reputation's ruint! (*She exits quickly*)

(JULIUS *enters.*)

BLAKE. (*Goes down* L.) What do you want? Didn't I tell you to stay dead?

JULIUS. Yes, boss, but ain't it time for me to be resurrected?

BLAKE. No—back to the attic.

JULIUS. Why, they's gone.

BLAKE. What?

JULIUS. Sure; I seed from a window upstairs.

BLAKE. Where's Watts?

JULIUS. Mr. Watts went with 'em!

BLAKE. Good boy, Watts. (*Going over to window*) He's steered them off. That's all right. You're resurrected.

JULIUS. What about that clerk in the office?

BLAKE. I'll fix him. (JULIUS *goes.* BLAKE *crosses to window, looks out, shakes his fist. After* JULIUS' *exit*) I've beaten you!

(BETH *enters hurriedly, holding receipt in hand, followed by* MRS. BABBIT, *who crosses down back of table* R.)

BETH. (C.) Oh, Mr. Blake, why didn't you tell me what you had done? Why did you let me accuse

you? Why did you let me say those things to you? Things I can never forget.

BLAKE. They had you rattled. (*Crossing to* BETH) You didn't know what you were saying. You thought I had robbed you of your land.

BETH. Ah, no, it wasn't that I thought you had robbed me of my land, but of my faith in you. How can you forgive me?

BLAKE. (*Starts to embrace her*) That's easy.

MRS. BABBIT. (*From back of table*) You people got lots a time for that—there's twenty-four hours to every day, but these few minutes are precious. How's she goin' to get out a this?

BLAKE. That's all right.

BETH. But I've said I'll sell. I've given my word of honor.

BLAKE. You're not going to split hairs about your word of honor in dealing with a couple of sharps who *have* no honor.

BETH. But must I stoop to their level and give them the right to despise me as I despise them?

MRS. BABBIT. You gotta fight trickery with trickery. (*From back of table*)

BLAKE. There is no dishonor in that.

BETH. (*Taking a step to* BLAKE) Well, I place myself in your hands. What do you want me to do?

BLAKE. Refuse to take that check.

BETH. But I've accepted it.

MRS. BABBIT *and* BLAKE. (*Together*) Wha-at!

BETH. Yes. Mr. Royce—just a few moments ago—while Mrs. Babbit was in here, sent me the check by the clerk. I took it and signed a receipt.

BLAKE. That's why they went away! (*Pause*) They've beaten us. (BLAKE *sits* L. *of table*)

BETH. Oh, what does it matter? Money doesn't count. (BETH *goes back of* BLAKE, *then drops to* R. *of table above chair*)

MRS. BABBIT. (*Coming down* L. *and* C.) That's what happens to an unprotected female! If you'd

had some man to take care of you—a husband—they could a whistled for their land.

BLAKE. What do you mean?

MRS. BABBIT. (*Coming over to* BLAKE *and* BETH) Check or no check, no married woman in this State can execute a deed without her husband's signature.

BLAKE. (*To* BETH) You haven't given them a deed yet?

BETH. (*Crossing to front of table*) No—(*Looking out of window*)

BLAKE. Bully for you, sister! (*He jumps up and kisses* MRS. BABBIT—*takes her up to door. She exits*) Well, it's all right. (*Coming down* L.)

BETH. (*Moving towards* C.) But I don't see.

BLAKE. (C. *and down*) You heard Sister Babbit? All you have to have is a husband.

BETH. But I haven't one.

BLAKE. We can soon fix that. Are you game? (*Coming to her*)

BETH. (*Going towards* BLAKE) Oh, yes, I'm game.

(BLAKE *goes toward her, is about to take her in his arms, when he stops and rushes to telephone.*)

BLAKE. Hello—hello—send up one minister and two witnesses, quick! (*Takes* BETH *in his arms*)

CURTAIN.

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